

Phillip E. Johnson's Leading Edge Columns from *Touchstone Magazine*

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The Power of Joan March 2005

Phillip E. Johnson

A few months ago, my wife's book discussion group was reading Mark Twain's neglected classic *Joan of Arc*. This novel purports to be the recollections of Sieur Louis de Conte, Joan's playmate in childhood and later her secretary. Twain employs this fictional narrator skillfully to tie together Joan's diverse lives with his personal recollections of all the events and characters.

Some readers will be in a hurry to get to the scenes of battle and court intrigue, but I lingered over charming episodes of village life, in which the illiterate farm child develops her skill at persuasion and begins to show her gift of prophecy. Soon enough the narrator goes on to the thrilling saga of the unlikely military hero who freed France from the English occupation that had followed Henry V's victory at Agincourt, and at last the tragic courtroom drama starring the martyr who brilliantly defended herself unassisted against an array of theologians and doctors of law in the most famous trial of the Middle Ages.

Twain's Reverence

I picked up the book at first out of curiosity, and continued to the end with pleasure at rediscovering one of the world's greatest true stories. Twain's account is in no way satirical, although there is plenty of delightful humor in the bantering of Joan's rustic companions. On the contrary, America's greatest humorist tells Joan's story reverently, accepting the miracles at face value and painting Joan as the pious, chaste, brilliant, witty, courageous, and loving military genius that her devoted followers knew her to be. It seems that Joan's conquest of Mark Twain's head and heart was as complete as her defeat of the English army of occupation several centuries earlier.

Twain's reconstruction of Joan's life was only partly an act of creative imagination, and mainly an exercise in painstaking historical scholarship. Joan's life is one of the best documented in premodern history. Her several trials, before and after her death, left voluminous records of testimony under oath about what Joan was like and everything she did from childhood to death at the stake, from her enemies and persecutors as well as her supporters, all meticulously supervised by the expert lawyers who managed the proceedings.

If modern readers find it hard to believe that saints from heaven actually visited a peasant girl in order to direct her to take command of the king's army and liberate France, plenty of Joan's

contemporaries were equally skeptical of her fantastic claims, and yet her power to persuade the skeptics and then to prove her bona fides by deeds was nothing less than supernatural.

Mark Twain devoted twelve years to studying the historical record before deciding, after many false starts, that he knew how to tell the story rightly. When he had finished writing, he concluded that the life of St. Joan of Arc was not only his finest book, but worth more than all his other books put together. The public and the critics did not agree, either at the time or subsequently, probably because the work was so unlike anything they expected to come from the irreverent Mississippi river pilot who had so hilariously burlesqued the literature of knights in armor when he planted a hardheaded Connecticut Yankee in King Arthur's Court.

Anyone would expect a life of St. Joan by Mark Twain to be a parody, and yet the evidence convinced this latter-day skeptic that Joan was every bit as wonderful as she had seemed to her contemporary admirers. He even convinced himself that he knew what Joan must have looked like. Protesting against those artists who had portrayed Joan as coarse because she was a peasant, he wrote in a 1904 essay that "the artist should paint her *spirit*—then he could not fail to paint her body aright. She would rise before us then, a vision to win us, not repel, a lithe, young splendid figure, instinct with the unbought grace of youth, dear and bonny and lovable, the face beautiful, and transfigured with the light of that lustrous intellect and the fires of that unquenchable spirit."

I cannot resist quoting the final words from Twain's essay: "Taking into account all the circumstances—her origin, youth, sex, illiteracy, early environment, and the obstructing conditions under which she exploited her high gifts and made her conquests in the field and before the courts that tried her for her life—she is easily and by far the most extraordinary person the human race has ever produced."

The Right Story

Some readers may judge those words excessive, but Twain's superlatives are founded securely on the historical record, and they come from one who seems among the least likely of all men of his time to have written them.

A biography of the great humorist records that "as Twain's life and career progressed he became increasingly pessimistic, losing much of the humorous, cocky tone of his earlier years. More and more of his work expressed the gloomy view that all human motives are ultimately selfish." Twain was captivated by Joan because he found her to be the great exception to the universal corruption that had depressed his spirit, a true saint who never in war or peace committed a selfish, dishonest, or cruel act.

While I was beginning this essay, I came upon a newspaper report that discussions in the Paris media these days are mainly about a widespread perception that France is a nation in decline. The economy is stagnant, the birthrate has fallen below the replacement level, English has become the de facto official language of the European Union, and there is general agreement that a national rigidity and aversion to risk have stunted France's development. That is about how things were when Joan of Arc was born about six hundred years ago.

Joan was the icon of French greatness for several centuries, until the French discarded everything that reminded them of the Church in the orgy of secularization that accompanied the Revolution, after which the military dictator Napoleon replaced Joan as the embodiment

of *la gloire*. It seems that the French are now in need of a new source of inspiration, and to find it they might be well advised to consider resurrecting their incomparable and most wrongfully neglected national heroine. Joan of Arc would make a magnificent symbol of national glory for modern France if that nation is at last weary of atheism, cynicism, and socialism.

She could be the patron saint both for lovers of tradition and for those who rebel against stale customs in the name of individual freedom and private inspiration. She was a thoroughly unpredictable teenage girl genius who broke out of the confined role that was all tradition would have permitted her, a model of genuine faith and piety in contrast to the tired cynicism that characterized the elites of France in her day as it does in ours, and a martyr to the cause of liberty in revolt against oppressive and risk-averse institutions.

France cannot expect to be blessed with another Joan, but it might suffice if a French Mark Twain could appear on the scene to study the historical records and tell the true story once again in a way that could inspire French men and women to feel their greatest national hero coming to life again in their imaginations. The right story can bring a decadent civilization to renewed vitality and creativity. The French have their own great national epic still at hand.

If some gifted storyteller could inspire them to believe that it really happened just as the records say, it might be that the incomparable Joan could once more rescue her nation from bitter despair and set it back on the road to greatness

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Casualties of the Drug Lords

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Phillip E. Johnson

On June 27, 2004, the *Boston Globe* published a story about the suicide of 16-year-old Kaitlyn Kennedy, who jumped off a stool at night with a rope around her neck in despair at her inability to resolve an off-and-on relationship with a controlling 20-year-old boyfriend. She knew that the relationship was unhealthy but couldn't bring herself to cut the tie completely.

After observing Kaitlyn's growing depression and self-destructive behavior, her frightened parents had sent her to a therapist, who prescribed the antidepressant drug Zoloft, beginning with a minimal dose and gradually increasing it to near the maximum level. When Kaitlyn was hospitalized briefly after deliberately cutting herself to draw blood, a nurse observed that she was increasingly agitated, irritable, and anxious, but did not link her condition to the drug. The parents learned later from medical records that their daughter had talked of her plan to hang herself.

On the day before the night Kaitlyn hanged herself, leaving a confused but loving note to her parents that seemed in places to be like that of a teen contemplating running away from home for a while rather than suicide, her father had shown the therapist a newspaper clipping about the risks of suicide among teens taking antidepressants. The therapist was unimpressed, and the parents, with an understandable desire to establish responsibility for an otherwise inexplicable tragedy, blamed the drugs she was taking and contemplated a lawsuit.

The causal connection between antidepressant drugs and teen suicide is suspected rather than proven, but the Food and Drug Administration issued a warning about it the month after Kaitlyn's suicide. Great Britain, citing the suicide risk, has banned most of the drugs for young people.

Kaitlyn's story caught my attention because a knowledgeable friend had recently remarked to me that he is appalled by the scale on which powerful drugs are being prescribed for teenagers with emotional problems, and because I know that the relationship between pharmaceutical companies and the medical profession is sufficiently corrupt to make any informed person suspect that doctors are not necessarily well-informed about the drugs they prescribe, and even that drugs are sometimes prescribed less for the benefit of the patient than for the profit of the drug manufacturers.

Institutionalized Corruption

On the same day that the *Globe* reported Kaitlyn's suicide, the *New York Times* published an article headlined "As Doctors Write Prescriptions, Drug Company Writes a Check." It began with this disclosure:

The check for \$10,000 arrived in the mail unsolicited. The doctor who received it from the drug maker Schering-Plough said it was made out to him personally in exchange for an attached "consulting" agreement that required nothing other than his commitment to prescribe the company's medicines. Two other physicians said in separate interviews that they, too, received checks unbidden from Schering-Plough, one of the world's biggest drug companies.

These checks and others issued to doctors by drug companies, it continued,

some of them said to be for six-figure sums, are under investigation by federal prosecutors in Boston as part of a broad government crackdown on the drug industry's marketing tactics. Just about every big global drug company—including Johnson & Johnson, Wyeth and Bristol-Myers Squibb—has disclosed in securities filings that it has received a federal subpoena, and most are juggling subpoenas stemming from several investigations.

Pervasive conflicts of interest stemming from pharmaceutical company payoffs extend from the modest level of routine medical practice up to the most exalted heights of biomedical research at prestigious universities and the National Institutes of Health (NIH).

Senior supervisors and institute directors at the NIH are the most highly paid employees of the federal government, taking home paychecks larger than those of Supreme Court justices. The *Los Angeles Times* shocked Congressional oversight committees by reporting in late 2003 that some of these senior biomedical researchers had accepted hundreds of undisclosed

consulting fees and stock options totaling millions of dollars from companies whose products the government doctors were evaluating for efficacy and safety.

The NIH is desperately trying to mollify Congressional outrage with belated efforts at reform, but there is no easy way to change a biomedical culture in which researchers assume that it is only fair that they should share in the profits of the companies whose products and practices they evaluate.

Other current news stories contribute to a widespread impression of institutionalized corruption in biomedical research. A story in the London *Guardian* in 2002 reported that “scientists are accepting large sums of money to put their names to articles endorsing new medicines that they have not written—a growing practice that some fear is putting scientific integrity in jeopardy.” No one familiar with biomedical scientific practice was surprised.

It is notorious in scientific publishing that articles supposedly by independent researchers are often written in the public relations offices of the drug manufacturers. It is also notorious that the companies don’t like to publicize drug trials that produced less than satisfactory results, and so doctors who prescribe medicines may know only about the favorable reports and not the evidence to the contrary even if they have done their best to keep up with current research.

Journal editors try to compel authors to disclose conflicts of interest, but nobody knows how to persuade professors to be content to live on their salaries when they see their colleagues getting rich by taking easy money and doing the bidding of the companies who pay them. Scientists like to believe that they are incorruptible, and so disclosing conflicts may seem to them like meaningless paperwork.

The True Culprit

The financial corruption is real, and its consequences are incalculable, but there is a spiritual corruption that goes deeper than that, and this may have been the true culprit in Kaitlyn’s suicide. I refer to the philosophical materialism that is a sacred dogma in Darwinian biology. This philosophy decrees that the mind is merely an artifact of the physical brain, there being nothing else that it conceivably could be.

It follows that all ailments of the mind and spirit are reflections of some flaw or imbalance in brain chemistry, and that the logical remedy is to prescribe a drug and then, if that does not seem to help, to increase the dose until it does. Undoubtedly there are psychiatric problems that can be helped greatly by drugs, but once a dominant philosophy has decreed that all phenomena are the direct or indirect result of chemical conditions, over-reliance on chemical remedies is virtually certain to follow.

Kaitlyn seems to have needed two kinds of guidance. At a practical level, she needed to learn how to set boundaries in her personal relationships and how to terminate relations with a person who would not respect those boundaries. At a spiritual level, she needed to learn that people exist for a purpose, and that periods of unhappiness are normal low points that can be overcome and need not prevent any individual from leading a gloriously fulfilling life.

But materialist biology encourages the assumption that we live in a purposeless world in which the goals of life are reduced to the pursuit of pleasure on the one hand, and the avoidance of pain or insecurity on the other. When youth have been educated to see the world

that way, the misery and anxiety of an insecure sexual relationship can make their lives seem not worth living. The same biologists who are advising the drug manufacturers for hefty fees are using their cultural power to demand that educators teach Darwinian evolution to every schoolchild in the land, with no criticism of fundamental assumptions allowed.

We are shocked when we read of teen suicides. Perhaps we should be surprised that there aren't a lot more of them.

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Overestimating AIDS

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Phillip E. Johnson

The *Boston Globe* reported in late June that estimates of the number of people in many countries with AIDS have been dramatically overstated because of errors in the statistical models used to estimate the number and other factors. The *Globe* said that analysts are cutting the estimates of those infected with HIV (the human immunodeficiency virus) in many nations by half or more. Rwanda's figure is being cut from eleven to five percent, and Haiti's from six to three percent.

The newspaper candidly reported that any finding that the epidemic may have been overstated will not be welcomed by activists who have devoted their careers to fighting HIV and do not want to see any HIV money diverted to meeting other needs. I presume that the thousands of HIV researchers and the multinational pharmaceutical companies that sell the expensive drug cocktails honestly believe what they say, but there are more than enough billions at stake in the estimates to motivate a tendency to believe the worst, which is actually the best if you are thinking in dollars.

In fact, the prevailing sentiment in AIDS research is that it is reprehensible to say or do anything that might cause the public to doubt the severity of the epidemic, because any doubts may cause people to risk unsafe sex, to neglect to take the nausea-inducing medications that are supposed to extend their lives, and, although this is left unsaid, to lose some of their enthusiasm for funding AIDS programs generously.

A Sweet Racket

When the biennial International AIDS Conference convened in Bangkok this past July, there was no mention of revising estimates of HIV prevalence downward, despite the consensus of experts reported in the *Globe*. These international conferences, supported by the pharmaceutical companies, have an ambience typical of United Nations conferences on peace or poverty, with delegates competing in the stridency of their denunciations of the United States and their demands for more money.

The delegates behave as if they know they have a sweet racket going and don't want to call attention to anything that might spoil it. The only news of importance revealed at the 2004 conference was that researchers are almost ready to give up on ever developing a vaccine.

Almost exactly 20 years ago, American health authorities announced the discovery of the virus (HIV) they said was the probable cause of AIDS, and predicted that a vaccine would be available within two years. Neither the exposure of the long-suppressed doubts about the validity of the scary statistics nor the failure of the vaccine trials has motivated the researchers to consider the possibility that there might be something wrong with their understanding of the epidemic.

As predictions fail and anomalies pile up, the AIDS experts cling to their theory as dogmatically as they have done since 1984. If anyone ever wonders, "Could we have made a mistake?" the unwelcome question never appears in the mass media or in the scientific journals. The World Health Organization and UNAIDS say that 42 million people around the world are infected with HIV, and that nearly 22 million people in Africa, the continent most severely affected, have died in the prime of their lives, leaving countless AIDS orphans.

The impasse in AIDS research suggests two questions. One is whether the HIV infection and mortality numbers have been inflated, either inadvertently or deliberately, in order to keep the money flowing. If they have been, the second question is whether the necessary statistical corrections reflect merely a somewhat reduced epidemic of the same general nature, or whether the statistics are wrong because the official understanding of the underlying syndrome is wrong.

The validity of the statistics is tied to the validity of the underlying virus theory because the horrific death totals are not derived by counting diagnosed bodies in hospitals or morgues, but by extrapolations delivered from a computer located in Switzerland. Here is how the Epimodel program works.

Every year, all over Africa, blood samples are taken from small numbers of women at pregnancy clinics and screened, not for the virus itself, but for proteins thought to be indicative of antibodies to HIV. From the premise that the presence of the antibody equals incurable infection, the Epimodel program calculates an estimate of the total number of African women infected by HIV. If so many women are infected, it follows that a like number of their husbands and lovers must be infected also, and, according to the underlying virus theory, all these will sicken and die at a predictable rate.

When these estimates are extrapolated to the general population, the computer modelers can arrive at seemingly precise tallies of the doomed, the dying, and the orphans left behind, with no need for anyone to verify the figures by counting bodies on the ground. Do the funded researchers regularly perform searches of mortality records to check if their estimates are accurate?

Expert Confidence

No. The HIV-scientists have so much confidence in their model that they see no need for corroborating the figures it generates, so any verification is strictly pro forma. Continent-wide verification is impossible because no reliable mortality records exist in most of Africa. The

primary exception is the Republic of South Africa, where a modern bureaucracy has kept reliable records of deaths for many years.

To my knowledge, the only serious effort to check up on whether the Epimodel's estimates are consistent with deaths actually recorded was performed by South African journalist Rian Malan, writing in the English magazine *The Spectator* in December 2003. Malan reported that wherever the computer-generated estimates can be checked against actual recorded deaths, the estimates turn out to be grossly exaggerated. Areas that are supposedly being decimated by AIDS show no increase in mortality, but rather are steadily increasing in population.

Malan's articles have been ignored by the HIV research community and by the elite newspapers, which continue to report the estimates as facts, facts that governments and foundations use as the basis for their programs. I am not reporting Malan's detailed analysis of the mortality and population figures here because my purpose is merely to prove the need for an authoritative critical appraisal of the numbers by impartial experts, experts independent of the pharmaceutical industry and also of the government and international bureaucracies, whose funding is dependent on maintaining public belief in a worldwide pandemic that is ever increasing and dwarfs all other health concerns in Africa.

The need for an audit becomes particularly apparent when we consider that AIDS in Africa has a definition (officially termed the "Bangui definition") so completely different from the definitions of AIDS used in North America and Europe that it is altogether a different condition, unique to Africa. Few people are aware of this discrepancy of definition because, as with anything that might induce skepticism toward the official story, the mainstream media do not report it.

In Africa, unlike America, a diagnosis of AIDS does not require even a single antibody test or proof of any specific AIDS-defining disease. Any person with such common conditions as persistent fever, coughing, and weight loss can and will be diagnosed as a doomed AIDS sufferer. These symptoms are characteristic of both malaria and tuberculosis, which are very common throughout Africa, as well as other diseases associated with malnutrition, polluted water, poor sanitation, and other deplorable conditions that prevail throughout the continent.

If the mortality estimates are far too high, as there is good reason to suspect, something must be seriously wrong with the assumptions that produced those estimates. There is no doubt that Africans suffer in great numbers from terrible diseases, especially malaria and tuberculosis, which is hardly surprising in a continent so afflicted with the miseries of poverty. If the developed nations are providing only HIV drug cocktails to deal with the endemic diseases of poverty, we are not only wasting many billions—which is the least of my concerns—we are utterly failing to provide the kind of assistance that would truly help Africans.

One Hope

Will there ever be an impartial inspection to see if we have been making a ghastly mistake? There will be no audit if the AIDS careerists can prevent it, because their credibility and standard of living depends upon maintaining the status quo, which requires not looking in places where you may find something you do not want to see.

There is one hope. South African President Thabo Mbeki has read the scientific literature, including articles by scientists who dispute the nature of the health crisis that threatens Africa,

and he has become skeptical, as most people do when they have an opportunity to study the facts that the official sources do not report. The major international media showered him with bad press when he questioned the AIDS orthodoxy several years ago. He seemed to retreat for a while, but earlier this year his party triumphed decisively in elections, and now he is in a much stronger political position to mount a challenge to the conventional wisdom if he chooses to do so, as many expect he will.

I hope he does not try to dispute the orthodoxy altogether, as he did in 2000, because the subject is too complicated to debate in the media. The smart strategy is simply to mount a thorough survey of the deaths that have actually occurred in South Africa, as opposed to those estimated by the computer model. If the discrepancy is anywhere near as great as I expect it to be, that should be enough to spark a thoroughgoing reappraisal of the assumptions that were responsible for the error.

The Boston Globe story can be found at www.boston.com/news/world/articles/2004/06/20/estimates_on_hiv_called_too_high.

The Spectator article can be found at www.spectator.co.uk/article.php?table=old&ion=back&issue=2003-12-13&id=3001.

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Taking the Cake

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Phillip E. Johnson

When my fiftieth birthday arrived in 1990, just before the publication of *Darwin on Trial*, my wife Kathie organized two surprise birthday parties, one in the morning for our Presbyterian church Bible study fellowship, and the other in the afternoon for my University of California law school faculty colleagues. Each party had its own specially decorated birthday cake. For the church group, the cartoon on the frosting was of the young David (me) slaying the giant Goliath (Darwinism).

Kathie thought that a more ironic theme would be appropriate for the secular professors, most of whom weren't sure what to make of my emerging notoriety as the scourge of Darwinism, and so the afternoon cake displayed Don Quixote tilting at windmills. Almost fifteen years later, those two birthday cakes still pose an unavoidable question about the prospects of the intelligent design movement. Are we slaying giants, or tilting at windmills?

Can we possibly succeed in slaying the gigantic error at which we have aimed our logical slingshot, and thereby liberate the people of God from their bondage to the Philistine philosophy of scientific naturalism? Sometimes the mission we have undertaken seems almost impossible, because the Darwinists are backed by the financial power of the federal

government and the major foundations, plus the cultural power of the academic elite and the national media.

Those are pretty mighty windmills, and they put out a lot of wind. Cultural mandarins with that kind of backing can misrepresent scientific challengers as religious fanatics yearning to impose a theocracy, and they can impose censorship and thought control while portraying themselves in their own newspapers, television programs, and classrooms as voices of reason standing up for religious liberty and honest science. In a word, the manipulators can get away with a lot of lying, and they take full advantage of the opportunity.

The continual exploitation of the *Inherit the Wind* myth of the 1925 Scopes trial is an egregious example. The real Scopes trial was an ACLU publicity stunt, in which nobody's liberty or job was at stake. The famous play, which is regularly revived in theaters across America and even in Britain, converts this farce into a moving tale of vicious persecution by Christian ministers that bears little resemblance to what actually happened. The Hollywood movie of the play is still frequently shown to public school science classes for the purpose of teaching the students to associate evolution with freedom and divine creation with repression.

Darwinism's Failure

Dr. Goebbels would have been impressed to see what propaganda can accomplish even in a democracy, where citizens are legally free to protest. If a cultural elite has sufficient control of the news media and the textbooks, it can marginalize disfavored opinions by confining them in categories that effectively label them as unworthy of serious consideration.

The Darwinists have the media and the money on their side, but the challengers increasingly have the science. I wish we could resolve our dispute with the Darwinists by scientific experiments, rather than having to spend most of our energies and resources battling to escape from a pejorative stereotype. In fact, the experiments have been done, and they show that, despite more than a century of prodigious efforts, no natural mechanism capable of producing significant biological transformations has ever been observed. After all the desperate efforts to confirm Darwin's theory, the record of failure is strong evidence that no such mechanism exists.

This is not surprising, once one understands that such a mechanism would need to accomplish not just change, but information creation on a colossal scale. Biologists who believe that the Darwinian mechanism can account for the extreme complexity and diversity of life hold that belief not because of what they have observed in their microscopes and in their experiments, but in spite of everything they know of biology from empirical observation and testing.

Fifty years ago, biologists and chemists confidently expected that newly discovered evidence would fix any deficiencies in the Darwinian model of evolution. If the theory were true, that probably would have happened. Instead, the Darwinists are losing some of their best textbook examples, including the fraudulent drawings of embryonic similarities and the staged photographs of moths on tree trunks. When new discoveries are made—like the recent discovery that non-coding regions of DNA are not “junk,” as Darwinists had assumed, but have important biological functions—they tend to expose new problems for the ruling theory or reveal that old problems remain unsolved.

I have on my desk an impressive collection of scientific articles by prominent biologists, titled *Origination of Organismal Form*. The Introduction describes organismal form as the “forgotten cause in evolutionary theory,” which is a bit like saying that gravity is the forgotten cause in physics. The editors go on to describe many open questions, which amount in toto to an acknowledgment that nothing much is known about how the forms of organisms originate. A perceptive critic observed long ago that “Darwin explained the *survival* of species but not the *arrival* of species.”

Just about anything related to “origination” is still a mystery to those who derive their conclusions from scientific evidence rather than from materialist philosophy or “just so” storytelling. Honest evolutionary biologists who want to survive in the profession have to be sufficiently circumspect that they can describe the evidence accurately, while carefully avoiding saying anything so unmistakably anti-Darwinian that they risk being shunned as traitors to the tribe.

Writings that convey a message of overall skepticism are common in mainstream biology, but the authors try to put a vaguely Darwinian spin on their findings wherever they can. They are resentful if creationists or other unbelievers quote their admissions to score points against Darwinism, even when the quotations are accurate and in context. To be fingered as one who has aided the enemy is not good for one’s career in biology. Edward Sisson in this issue has it right: Evolutionary biologists play the role of a hardball litigation firm that has taken on scientific naturalism as a client, and will do whatever it takes to win its case. When scientists become single-minded advocates for a holy cause, then what they produce is known as “junk science.”

Darwinism’s Demise

I am convinced that the factor that makes it extremely difficult to discredit Darwinism today is the very factor that ensures the theory’s demise in the not very distant future. The crucial factor is that the cultural stakes are colossal. If Darwinism were to disappear tomorrow, experimental science would be unaffected, except insofar as the prestige of the ruling biologists might suffer so much that their funding would drop.

The importance of Darwinism is cultural, not scientific. The power of the Darwinian myth over modernist minds is so complete that reasoning in all subjects, including law, literature, ethics, and sometimes even theology, has to start from the assumption that God is out of the picture. The prestige of most of the professors and pundits who have cognitive authority in our culture depends on the public’s acquiescence in the materialist creation myth that Darwin is thought to have proved. That means that there are many clever and wealthy people who have an overwhelming interest in preserving the regnant creation story and demonizing its critics.

It also means that there are many clever and hungry people who have a motive for wanting to topple the ruling mythology and replace it with something that better fits their sense of what is ultimately real. When the hungry clever people finally understand their opportunity, Darwinism will join its cousins Marxism and Freudianism in the dustbin of intellectual history. Won’t that take the cake?

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May 2004

Grand Canyon Mystery Tour

Grand Canyon Mystery Tour

Phillip E. Johnson

During the final four months of 2003, privately managed bookstores in Grand Canyon National Park sold about 300 copies of a slim book of scenic photographs with accompanying text, compiled by a veteran canyon tour guide named Tom Vail and titled *Grand Canyon: A Different View*. These book sales sparked a minor media firestorm after a retired geology professor named Elders came across the book in the park and saw, to his horror, that it argued for the creationist “flood geology” position: that the canyon was carved out very rapidly only a few thousand years ago by the waters of the worldwide flood that Noah’s Ark survived, as recounted in the book of Genesis.

After receiving protests from Elders and other geologists, the presidents of seven major geological organizations signed a letter to the park superintendent that characterized the creationist book as religion disguised as science, and urged that it be removed from the stores or at least be clearly separated from books that present an acceptable scientific understanding of Grand Canyon geology. Seeing an opportunity for compromise, the bookstore managers moved the book to a separate section for inspirational reading, but continued to sell it.

That may not seem like much of a conflict, but prominent stories about the book and the protest appeared in elite newspapers across the nation, as well as in Britain. (British journalists are fascinated by American creationism, and tend to assume it has become government policy under the despised Bush administration.) In short, the indignant geological establishment handed the creationists a publicity bonanza, confirming the adage that there is nothing so likely to backfire as an unsuccessful attempt to ban a book. I am sure I am not the only person who was so intrigued by the publicity that I obtained a copy of the book from Amazon for \$17.

I have to say I was favorably impressed, although I know that I invite disapproval by praising a book written by creationists. I continue to take no position on either the age of the earth or the origin of the Grand Canyon, but the exquisite photographs of canyon scenery are exceptionally well presented, and the accompanying articles, including several by persons with doctorates in geology or related sciences from well-regarded universities, are reasonable and informative—at least if you concede the possibility that an argument for biblical creationism can be based on anything more worthy than ignorance and prejudice.

The book is forthrightly based on the assumption that the Bible is the inerrant word of God, but I find no fault with any assumption that is candidly stated and honestly defended, however

controversial it may be. I only wish that the rulers of science would state their precommitment to naturalism openly and defend it forthrightly, instead of hiding naturalism in the definition of “science” and then presenting as observed or experimentally tested fact conclusions that are actually derived from naturalistic philosophy.

If you are curious about young-earth creationism and would like to judge the professional quality of its leading proponents for yourself, you would make a good start by reading this book rather than relying on the usual media stereotype. Even Professor Elders was reported to have said that “this is the only young-earth creationist text that I have enjoyed reading.” I think it is good for the public to be made aware that there is often more than one way to interpret evidence. If a contrarian book contains error, the dominant scientific party has plenty of resources to defend its position. There should be no thought-crimes in science.

Mysterious Origin

The controversy over the book was enlightening for the public because the very professional *Los Angeles Times* story explained just how mysterious the origin of the Grand Canyon really is. Apparently, the park’s official interpreters still tell the public that the canyon was carved out gradually as the Colorado River cut slowly through the layers of rock. This account follows the uniformitarianism established as geological orthodoxy by Charles Lyell in the first half of the nineteenth century.

According to this doctrine, “the present is the key to the past,” because geological features can be presumed to be the results of the steady operation of forces, like erosion, that can be observed in operation today. Holding to an *a priori* rule like uniformitarianism gives scientists a big head start on solving any puzzle, because it drastically narrows the possibilities that would otherwise have to be considered. Contrariwise, if a feature like the Grand Canyon may have been produced by some ancient catastrophe that is unlike anything we can observe today, then a lot of guesswork has to be involved in determining exactly what may have happened, and certainty may be elusive.

Uniformitarianism is currently on the defensive, however, and catastrophist explanations for the Grand Canyon, involving enormous deluges of water acting in a geological instant, are now vigorously and emotionally debated in mainstream geological circles. George Billingsley, a prominent geologist who has studied the Grand Canyon for 36 years, told the *Los Angeles Times* that a scientific symposium held in 2000 to resolve the question of how the canyon was formed dissolved into acrimony and adjourned without consensus.

It sounds as if the conference could hardly have been more contentious even if creationists had been allowed to participate. For that matter, I suspect that one reason a uniformitarian explanation of the canyon is still defended so vigorously by some is that geologists know that creationists will make good use of any acknowledgment of a catastrophic origin for so famous a landmark as the Grand Canyon.

On the other hand, if geologists base their defense against creationism on a dogmatic uniformitarianism, they may be relying upon an obsolete weapon. The problem was succinctly summarized in remarks by historian Stephen J. Pyne, whose book *How the Canyon Became Grand* is also on sale in the park’s bookstores. Pyne said that he did not mind if Vail’s book was sold at the park, so long as it was not displayed in the science section. “I think the Park Service would be remiss if it did not explain that there is no agreed-upon story about the

canyon; there are conflicting stories. But science assumes it was not formed by a great flood or divine intervention. What this creationist group is looking for is some sort of validation by the Park Service. There's an agenda here."

Pyne implies that there is something shady about having an agenda, but that is a distraction. Of course the creationists have an agenda—but so do their adversaries. The creationists want to persuade as many people as possible that, although most scientists may currently assume that the canyon was not created by a great flood, a reasonable interpretation of the scientific evidence nonetheless supports the flood theory. This agenda is advanced if their book is sold in the park bookstores without a stigmatizing label or placement.

The mainstream geologists want to withhold the legitimizing label "science" from a theory they detest, in hope of discouraging the public from taking it seriously. They want such a book to appear only if it carries a label saying (in effect), "This is not Science," which is to say, "Untrue."

Both sides to the dispute are trying to advance or protect the truth as they see it, and the outcome should depend upon the evidence, not the labels. My own suggestion would be that, if mainstream geologists can't tell us anything more definite than that they themselves hold conflicting theories of the canyon's origin, then perhaps all those stories, including the uniformitarian one, belong on that shelf labeled "inspirational reading."

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March 2004

The Galileo Syndrome

The Galileo Syndrome

Phillip E. Johnson

The trial of Galileo is known to the public almost entirely as a one-dimensional morality play, in which freedom of thought, embodied in science, is persecuted by dogmatic oppression, embodied in the Catholic Church. Recent retellings of the story, such as Wade Rowland's *Galileo's Mistake*, challenge modernist prejudice by portraying a more complex tangle in which the over-bearing Galileo bears part of the responsibility for forcing a showdown with Pope Leo VIII, who had been Galileo's friend and supporter until the great scientist's contempt for authority exhausted his patience.

The Church did not object to the Copernican theory, provided that Galileo advanced it only as a useful hypothesis and not as the literal truth. Perhaps astronomers were finding the hypothesis of Copernicus preferable to the geocentric tradition for such scientific tasks as navigation and the prediction of eclipses. The Church was willing to leave such scientific

questions to the scientists, while recognizing that scientific convenience is not the only guide to truth.

It was otherwise when Galileo, writing for the public in Italian rather than solely for the scholars in Latin, employed his immense prestige and rhetorical skill to teach that a rotating and revolving earth was not merely a fiction adopted for its convenience in scientific work, but was truly the way things really are, regardless of what the Church thought about the matter. By crossing that line, Galileo directly challenged the Church's authority during a critical phase of the Counter-Reformation, and the Church understandably had objections, both scientific and theological.

Galileo Thought Otherwise

I will not go into the former, because my priority is to explain the “mistake” of Wade Rowland's title, and to describe the intriguing parallel between Galileo's situation and that of the Intelligent Design movement today as we confront the scientific community's institutions, which are as powerful over questions of knowledge in our time as the Church was in Galileo's. In brief, some esteemed theologians interpreted the Bible as implying or assuming geocentrism, whereas some esteemed scientists, notably Galileo, interpreted the evidence of science as requiring a sun-centered astronomy.

Assuming that both the Bible and scientific investigation are reliable sources of knowledge, as nearly everyone did at the time, then either the theologians were mistaken in *their* interpretation of the few lines of Scripture that seemed to create a problem, or the scientists were mistaken in their interpretation of the evidence of nature. It seems obvious that both possibilities ought to have been considered, but Galileo thought otherwise. He quoted Augustine to prove that Scripture often employs figurative language and so the interpretation of Scripture must be guided by what is known through reason and observation.

So far so good, but Galileo did not concede that the reverse was also true, because he thought that nature was its own interpreter, and presented reality directly to the scientific observer. To illustrate the mistake, Rowland paraphrased Galileo's explanation from his *Letter to the Grand Duchess Christina* (the mother of Galileo's patron Cosimo, the grand duke of Tuscany): “In any case, Galileo argues, the Bible is not a scientific text. It is a moral and spiritual document that should not be relied upon for information on the nature of the physical universe.”

Certainly, the fact that the Bible may appear to contradict evidence produced by scientific inquiry should not be enough to debunk the scientific claims. Moreover, Galileo insisted, Scripture should not be used to deny any scientific claim that is *susceptible* to confirmation, even if the confirmation may not yet have been achieved. How it is to be determined that a claim may be proved, in the absence of that proof, is a problem he does not address. Galileo clearly believed that there was little that science could not illuminate. This position left the role remaining to religion as one of filling in the gaps: temporarily providing explanations in areas into which science had not yet expanded its knowledge.

Galileo does not appear to have seen this implication, but the Church clearly did, and found unacceptable the inevitable marginalization it implied. Loyal son of the Church though he may have been, Galileo nonetheless came very near to stating the radical doctrine that nowadays we call positivism, or scientism. If Galileo could not foresee how granting this kind

of epistemic supremacy to science would result in the marginalization of religion, we have no need for foresight because we have seen the outcome. No wonder the Church thought it had to assert its authority!

The Church of Science

I have turned to the Galileo episode not to compete with historians in assessing the blame for the tragedy, but because the elements of that conflict are present again in the hot argument between the Intelligent Design movement in biology and Darwinism. Today the scientific profession has firmly grasped the authority once possessed by the Catholic Church and contested by Galileo, the power to judge which claims have the status of knowledge and which do not. Like the Church of Galileo's day, the Church of Science can tolerate almost any concept if it remains no more than a hypothesis or metaphor, provisionally adopted as an aid to understanding and not advocated as literally true.

That includes the observation that organisms seem in some respects to be designed. Articles by biologists of unimpeachable orthodoxy offhandedly refer to the genome as the "book of life," and biologists without embarrassment sometimes employ "reverse engineering" to determine the function of some puzzling feature. The arch-materialist Richard Dawkins has described some of the most powerful examples of apparent design in biology, and yet he is outraged when others suggest the possibility that the design so powerfully apparent may conceivably be real.

The philosophy that governs contemporary biology requires that all features of organisms be attributed to a combination of random variation and natural selection, even though the alleged creative power of this mechanism has never been demonstrated. There is no objection to the design hypothesis when it is followed by an assurance that apparent design is an illusion produced somehow by natural selection, but there is violent objection to any suggestion that design in biology may be a truth of enormous cultural importance which stands as evidence that there may after all be a real Designer who cares about how people behave.

I do not think that the convenience of biologists can be the sole standard by which the reality of intelligent design is judged. The religious authorities of Galileo's day did not care what assumptions astronomers preferred for their calculations, but they cared a great deal about preserving their own exclusive authority to decide what is real and what is merely a useful fiction or metaphor. The scientific authorities today govern a pragmatic enterprise in which scientists are generally free to try any hypotheses that seem useful, although professional ruin may be the punishment for taking a case to the public in a manner that threatens the authority of the scientific hierarchy.

The aspect of the Intelligent Design movement that most irks the mandarins of science is that we do not limit ourselves to submitting papers to peer-reviewed scientific journals, accepting the inevitable judgment of the reviewers that the papers should not be published. The bishops and Jesuit scholars of Galileo's time thought it was unfair and unprofessional for Galileo to appeal over their heads to the public, and the mandarins of science today are equally determined to confine thoughts that endanger their authority to professional circles they control. The cast of characters has changed, and the penalties are milder, but the drama is basically the same.

There is always an orthodoxy in any important area of knowledge, and a class of mandarins who make and enforce its rules. While the orthodoxy is successful, it may seem so obviously correct that the rules do not need to be precisely articulated and rebellion is nearly inconceivable. On important occasions, however, insurgents may perceive a crucial weakness in the orthodoxy and defy the rules, contending that the mandarins have exceeded their authority or relied upon some false doctrine.

The challenge will always seem irrational to the orthodox, because by definition, it breaks the rules that define rationality. If the insurgents prevail, they may end up by imposing a new orthodoxy, which in its turn will seem obvious and permanent for a long time as “the way things are,” until some new rebellion inspires people to realize that the way we think today is not necessarily the way we are going to think tomorrow.

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December 2003

Mothballed Science

Mothballed Science

Phillip E. Johnson

The peppered moth story, for almost fifty years the prime textbook example of evolution by natural selection, is fast becoming biology's greatest embarrassment. Before long, *Biston betularia*, to use the moth's scientific name, will be famous only as the subject of a messy experiment whose faults were overlooked because the data were needed to support something that leading biologists and many other people badly wanted to believe.

Anybody who ever took a biology class has seen the photos of light and dark moths that all the textbooks use to illustrate this classic example. The official story is that the peppered moth in Britain, normally off-white with a freckling of black scales, was well camouflaged against a background of lichen-covered tree trunks until the Industrial Revolution. In 1848, a collector spotted a single dark (melanic) moth in the industrial midlands. Thereafter, the melanic variety quickly spread throughout polluted industrial districts.

Scientists theorized that smoke from the factories killed the lichen and darkened the tree trunks on which the moths were believed to rest during the day. Viewed against the newly blackened background, the melanic moths were virtually invisible to birds and so flourished uneaten, while the lighter variety became bird food and declined in number, until air pollution restrictions in the mid-twentieth century allowed the lichen to grow back on the tree trunks. Then the lighter-colored moths made a rapid comeback, or so the story goes.

Bernard Kettlewell, a medical doctor and skilled moth collector whose scientific training was minimal, performed allegedly “carefully controlled” experiments in the mid-1950s to verify

the numbers of light and dark moths in polluted and unpolluted regions. Kettlewell thus confirmed, or so it seemed at the time, that differential bird predation had caused the back-and-forth shifts of the predominant coloring in the moth population.

Biologists acclaimed Kettlewell's studies for providing what he called "Darwin's missing evidence," the first confirmation that natural selection had any effect whatever in the wild. Lacking such evidence, Darwin could only illustrate his theory with examples from domestic animal breeding, a process guided by human intelligence rather than by nature. Armed with Kettlewell's evidence, and uninhibited by any reluctance to extrapolate wildly, the biologists had sufficient confidence, when they gathered in Chicago in 1959 to celebrate the centennial of Darwin's masterpiece, *The Origin of Species*, to declare to a credulous world that the entire Darwinian story of biological creation had been proved beyond doubt.

Ever since, the peppered moth story has been Exhibit A in the Darwinists' case, cited so often and with such emphasis that it came to seem the very embodiment of Darwin's theory.

Nothing Proved

Anyone who can reason logically can see at once that the moth story, even taken at face value, proves nothing about how moths, trees, birds, and scientific observers came into existence in the first place.

One of the things that amazed me when I first began to study evolution was that most biologists vigorously dispute that fact, and insist that evolution, supposedly the creator of us all, requires no more than the accumulation over geological time of slight changes in gene frequencies of the kind illustrated by the peppered moth story. When Darwinism has passed into the dustbin of history, an event that surely will occur sometime in this century, historians will marvel at the spectacular power this ideology possessed in its heyday to cloud the minds of otherwise intelligent people, including the majority of scientists.

For years I avoided telling my lecture audiences about any of the defects in Kettlewell's scientific practices, preferring not to distract them from contemplating the absurdity of using this trivial example to prove that natural selection is capable of creating such marvels as cells, wings, eyes, and brains. Now, however, the hilarious true story of the botched Kettlewell studies has leaked out to the general public, and the story is too good not to tell and retell. The Darwinists are stuck with an icon that they can't afford to abandon and don't know how to defend.

The trouble started in 1998 when a moth expert named Michael Majerus published a book that Oxford University Press had, ironically, commissioned to commemorate Kettlewell's achievement. Majerus disclosed enough of Kettlewell's many departures from proper scientific practice to inspire a reviewer to examine the original papers and then to write in *Nature* that the situation was even worse than Majerus had suggested, so that "for the time being we must discard the peppered moth as a well-understood example of natural selection in action."

Subsequently, Darwinists, including the reviewer himself, were horrified to learn that "creationists" were publicizing the *Nature* book review all over the Internet. (The word "creationist" in Darwinist usage has no fixed definition and is mainly an insult that Darwinists apply to anyone who challenges some tenet of Darwinism in an unacceptable or dangerously

effective manner.) Even more ominously, shocking newspaper stories began to appear. For example, a headline in the London newspaper *The Independent* asked bluntly if the moth's iconic status is based on fraudulent research.

I don't have space to go into all the scandalous details, but one of the juiciest is that the moths, which are nocturnal, do not rest on tree trunks during the day but prefer to fly up into the branches. The textbook photographs were staged, often by pinning or gluing dead moths in place.

You can read the entire story in Judith Hooper's wonderful book, *Of Moths and Men*. It is a bombshell. Dava Sobel, the acclaimed author of *Longitude* and *Galileo's Daughter*, describes the book on the dust jacket as a riotous story of ambition and deceit, about scientists who "arrange the evidence to arrive at the desired result." Another jacket endorsement is by Ernst Mayr, the dean of living Darwinists. A Mayr endorsement is the nearest thing to a papal imprimatur that biology can provide.

The first reaction of biologists to the moth revelations is usually unconcern, because they assume that Darwinism is by now past all danger of refutation. A delayed panic typically follows, once the biologist realizes the likely consequences if publishers were to take the *Nature* reviewer's advice and either drop Kettlewell's bogus proof from the textbooks or admit all the embarrassing circumstances. For the Darwinists to hand the hated creationists a victory of that magnitude would be unthinkable, and possibly fatal.

For comparison, try to imagine the likely effect on the outcome of the Civil War if the Union Army had been forced at some point to abandon the national capital to the Army of Northern Virginia. The District of Columbia had little military value, and the northern states would still have had much greater resources than the Confederacy, but the symbolic effect, and eventually the tangible effect, of the setback would have been incalculable.

A Real Scandal

There is a colossal scandal in the peppered moth saga, and it goes far beyond anything that the over-enthusiastic Kettlewell may have done in the 1950s. The real scandal is that the most influential biologists overlooked the defects in the Kettlewell studies when they were first published, because the appearance of "Darwin's missing evidence" was so convenient for them, and they continue to deny the facts today, to the extent of vilifying the messengers who bring them the bad news.

Even Michael Majerus, who provided the first disclosures that set off the scandal, has become a diehard defender of the official story, now that the delayed panic has set in. Majerus has started a five-year experiment in his own back garden in the hope that it will produce Kettlewell's missing evidence, proof that birds in the wild are driving the changes in the dark and light moths that are allowed to light where they like on a tree while it is still night.

I admire the show of team spirit, but the question today is how Darwinists behave, not how birds and moths behave. The Darwinists have far too much of their credibility invested in the Kettlewell studies to disavow them now, so their only option is to circle the wagons and pretend that everything is still as it was in 1959. Hence, the textbook publishers, encouraged by the scientists, are stonewalling the critics and admitting no problems.

We are living through a great experiment in scientific practice today, the outcome of which will tell us whether science is ultimately what it claims to be: an honest business in which faulty evidence can be discredited even if powerful vested interests are desperately protecting it or whether the mandarins of science in Darwinian times have grown so powerful, and so cynical, that truth no longer has a place in science and only power rules. The experiment is ongoing, but a trend is visible.

The Darwinists are as determined to protect the peppered moth icon as that Dutch boy was to plug the dyke, but the truth is seeping through their guard. My prediction is that Judith Hooper's *Of Moths and Men* will go down in history as one of the most important books of this century because its success will demonstrate that the truth eventually emerges, however determined the mandarins of science and culture are to protect an illusion that supports their authority.

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October 2003

The African Century?

The African Century?

Phillip E. Johnson

At the end of Harriet Beecher Stowe's great novel *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, the escaped slave George Harris, after achieving a university education in Europe, announces his decision to leave the white man's countries, where he can expect at best to be only tolerated. His plan is to settle with his family in Liberia, where he can devote his energy and intelligence to building a distinctively African Christian civilization as an example to the world both of liberation and forgiveness. George explained his vision to Mrs. Stowe's millions of nineteenth-century readers in a vivid prophecy of Africa's destiny, which I will quote:

I trust that the development of Africa is to be essentially a Christian one. If not a dominant and commanding race, Africans are, at least, an affectionate, magnanimous, and forgiving one. Having been called in the furnace of injustice and oppression, they need to bind closer to their hearts that sublime doctrine of love and forgiveness through which alone they are to conquer, which it is to be their mission to spread over the continent of Africa.

That kind of prophecy, if anyone knew of it, would have seemed far from reality during the twentieth century, in a materialist intellectual climate, when Mrs. Stowe's classic was no longer read, and Christianity seemed to be in retreat in Africa and elsewhere. Since 1945, the news from post-colonial Africa has featured mainly war, tyranny, corruption, and social chaos. Intellectuals and bureaucrats looked to technology rather than Christianity to solve the world's problems.

The development, or attempted development, of Africa was not Christian, nor was it successful in materialist terms. At the end of the twentieth century, the policy question that was debated in religious and political circles was whether the developed nations should formally forgive the uncollectable loans that were made and wasted while economists and diplomats were under the illusion that borrowed money and technology would bring development to Africa. Obviously, the paradigm guiding expert thinking about development was leaving something important out of consideration. From our limited vantage point at the beginning of the twenty-first century, it may seem that Africans are destined always to be victims and never leaders, much less conquerors. We should be careful not to come to judgment too soon, however, because at the beginning of the third millennium after Christ, the world is changing rapidly in a direction that is making George Harris's prophecy seem more realistic.

The Christian faith is growing rapidly around the world, more rapidly even than Islam, and it is growing everywhere except in what were formerly thought to be its home territories in Europe and North America. Christianity is no longer primarily the property of white men and women living in Europe and North America; nor is its health and activity in Africa today mainly the responsibility of adventurous missionaries. As documented in *The Next Christendom* by Philip Jenkins, Christianity's center of gravity is shifting radically to the south and east. It is already accurate to say that a majority of the world's Christians, and the most faithful Christian witnesses, are to be found either in Africa and South America, or in Asian countries like China and Korea.

This geographical shift of faith, which will only grow more pronounced in the current century, is one of those major news stories that receive little media attention at present, because our most influential journalists live in closed communities of materialist prejudice, which protect them from learning that what seems important to them is not necessarily what seems important to the rest of the world. Whether noticed or not, the new and growing centers of Christian faith are thriving on their own resources, and are even beginning to send missionaries to the spiritually and morally confused nations of the north and west that have squandered their spiritual inheritance. In these unprecedented times of religious fluidity and Christian growth, it becomes possible that Africans will take a position of spiritual leadership not only in their own continent but in the world.

I was recently reminded of the importance of this new geography of religion when pondering the symbolic significance of the reception at Georgetown University's commencement ceremony in May of the Nigerian cardinal, Francis Arinze, who presides over the Pontifical Council for Interreligious Dialogue at the Vatican and whose name frequently comes up in speculation about the election of the next pope.

According to reports of the Georgetown incident, Cardinal Arinze offended Georgetown's liberals when he referred disapprovingly in his commencement address to the negative effect on the family of contraception, abortion, infanticide, homosexuality, and euthanasia. These comments, especially the reference to homosexuality, inspired some students and faculty to walk out of the ceremony and produced continuing protests from the dominant factions of the Georgetown community, who evidently consider that it is for them to teach faith and morals to the cardinal, rather than for him to teach these subjects to them.

The symbolism of the event, including the protest, captivated my imagination. The last time a pope was chosen, it was a bold and marvelously appropriate step to choose a man from a

Catholic country suffering under Communist oppression. This first Polish pope soon played a major role in liberating his own country and eventually in bringing a welcome end to the Soviet empire. In the very different conditions of today, it would be another bold and marvelously appropriate step to select an African pope, especially so if the man were a cardinal whose special expertise is in Christian-Islamic dialogue. Such a pope could make a fresh start in imposing much-needed discipline on wayward bishops and in calling Catholics and the rest of us back to the basic principles of family morality, which we often seem to have forgotten. If all that were to happen, I think it would not be many years before the climate even at Georgetown University took a sharp turn towards sanity and orthodoxy.

It is not difficult to imagine a comparable Protestant scenario. The twenty-first century's Billy Graham, for example, might be an immensely charismatic and yet humble man from South America or China, or from Africa. Now that Christian faith is truly worldwide, it is both inevitable and desirable that due recognition be given to leaders from those geographic areas where the greatest numbers of the world's faithful Christians are going to be living. Of course, it will be uncomfortable at first for those of us in the world's most powerful country to acknowledge such new leadership, but we will get used to it, just as huge audiences around the world learned to come to Christ through the North Carolina charm of Billy Graham. The growth of an international Christian community of nations does not imply a century of religious conflict. On the contrary, such a community is more likely to produce peace and understanding than is continued reliance upon the deadlocked power politics of the United Nations—that fatally flawed product of mid-twentieth century utopianism.

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July/August 2003

Uncle Tom's Victory

Uncle Tom's Victory

Phillip E. Johnson

On a recent auto trip, my wife and I passed the freeway miles listening to a recording of *Uncle Tom's Cabin*. In the 1850s, this sensational bestseller lit the fuse of the explosion of moral passion that made the American Civil War inevitable, and so touched the conscience of England that the British government could not pursue its commercial interests by helping the South to break the ruinous naval blockade. Today, hardly anybody reads *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, probably because the book has picked up a reputation as a cliché-ridden anti-slavery potboiler rather than as the moving story of faith and courage it truly is.

Another reason for the neglect of *Uncle Tom's Cabin* is that it is written with a profoundly Christian sensibility that modern people have been taught to deride. This factor alone would prevent the book from being read or even honestly described in our supposedly multicultural school systems, where the textbooks no longer even acknowledge that Dr. Martin Luther

King, Jr., was a “Reverend.” Harriet Beecher Stowe, the author of *Uncle Tom’s Cabin*, went so far as to insist at times that, “I did not write that book.” She meant that the words came to her in bursts of inspiration directly from the Holy Spirit, and I think that you have to be capable of believing that to appreciate fully the miracle that this little woman of limited experience somehow put on paper.

Anybody could have described the horrors of slavery, or explained that the oppressed slaves were human beings like all the rest of us, not the sub-humans with only brutish feelings that the slaveholders had to believe them to be. Mrs. Stowe’s art was that she made the slaves and those who helped or oppressed them come alive in the imagination of people who knew nothing of slavery. Her readers could feel the desperation of slave mothers whose children were torn from them to be sold “down river” to lives of cruel misery, and they also felt the tragedy of whites who tried to be kind and to do justice in a society whose legal system was built upon slavery, which was cruelty and injustice legalized. She brought alive the simple virtues of brave people who struggled just to read a few words, but who understood the message of the Bible better than all the learned clergymen of the world, perhaps because they were able to come to it as little children, as Jesus said we all must.

Under the influence of Marxist logic, which is still influential in Europe and America despite the disasters of Marxism in practice, Uncle Tom’s name and faith became symbolic of shuffling acquiescence to racial degradation. This noble character is in truth the incarnation in antebellum America of the Suffering Servant of Isaiah 53, the archetype of the Christ, who overcomes the world by the patient endurance of what cannot be avoided, and whose triumph on the cross will always look like defeat to those who do not believe or understand the Bible.

The slave system was designed to brutalize, to make the slaves as brutish as their masters needed them to be. Even the best-intentioned masters only helped the evil system to survive longer by diluting its poison with their thin goodness. Their remembered kindnesses sometimes contributed to the misery of slaves who would find themselves sold after a kind master’s death or bankruptcy to a sadistic tyrant like Simon Legree.

Uncle Tom’s victory was that even the greatest cruelty and misfortune could not degrade him to the point where he lost his faith in Christ or became willing to save himself from evil by doing evil to others. When Legree orders Tom to either beat another slave and become an informer or be beaten to death himself, Tom calmly endures torture and death rather than do anything he knows to be wrong. When Tom dies at last, we readers can almost hear the shouts of welcome from that cloud of witnesses who were alongside him from the start.

It is superficial to read *Uncle Tom’s Cabin* as if it were only an overwhelmingly powerful attack upon the racial slave system of its day. It was that, of course, but one can be a slave in many ways, some of which may even disguise themselves as liberation. *Uncle Tom’s Cabin* is really an exposure of sin, which encompasses every form of cruelty and exploitation, and especially the all too common self-deception that leads an individual to enslave himself to evil habits in the deluded belief that he is thereby exercising his own free will. Tom knew that he was a victor at the moment of his death, but he might not have felt so victorious if he had known what would happen to his people after emancipation, in a nation that debates not whether to end slavery or segregation, but whether to curtail racial preferences for blacks in law school admissions.

I came home from that auto trip to read a *New York Times* story titled, “Prison Rates Among Blacks Reach a Peak, Report Finds.” It seems that on any given day, 12 percent of black men aged 20 to 34 are in jail or prison. The corresponding rate for white men is 1.6 percent. Over their lifetime, 28 percent of black men will spend time in prison.

The imprisonment rate for blacks is disproportionately high, but the number of prisoners of all races is also four times what it was before the mid-1970s, when prison sentences started to skyrocket. I have called the 1960s the period of America’s Declaration of Independence from God. The godless times began with the triumphalist Darwinian centennial in 1959, and the courts soon converted the constitutional commitment to religious freedom into a commitment to enforced secularization of public life and education. The sexual revolution of the 1960s was a logical consequence, as was the abortion revolution of the 1970s, when moral relativism was shoe-horned into the Constitution in what Supreme Court Justice Byron White rightly called an exercise of “raw judicial power.” The fruit of relativism and God-despising is not liberty, but addiction, murder, and imprisonment.

Amazingly, black Americans kept their Christian faith and their devotion to family life intact despite the cruel separation of family members in slave auctions, and through the horrors of lynchings and segregation that came afterwards. A spiritual strength that resisted oppression heroically was eventually worn down by the poisonous influence of a culture that taught black and white citizens to despise God and to exalt “choice” as the only moral standard. One hundred and ten years after emancipation, and about ten years after that Second Declaration of Independence, imprisonment for crime rather than slavery had become the great destroyer of black families.

Americans of all races hardly even knew what they had lost. How could they know? Unlike the barely literate Tom, they were no longer educated in the things that matter most.

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May 2003

Ya Gotta Believe!

Ya Gotta Believe!

Phillip E. Johnson

Biology professor Michael Dini of Texas Tech University made himself a media celebrity by publishing on his web page his criteria for recommending students to medical school. Dini requires that a student seeking a recommendation be earning an A in his class and be well known by him. So far so good, but he also demands that the student affirm “truthfully and forthrightly” a scientific answer to the question, “How do you think the human species originated?” Dini’s words appear to mean that a student seeking a recommendation must not

only demonstrate an understanding of evolution but also affirm a personal belief that the human species originated purely by natural causes and not by divine creation.

This last requirement became newsworthy when the US Department of Justice advised Professor Dini that it was investigating a student's complaint that the requirement of belief in evolutionary naturalism violated his right to religious freedom. The legal case is somewhat hypothetical because the student in question withdrew from the course before earning a grade. Nonetheless, the complaint received newspaper coverage in Dallas, Boston, New York, Washington, D.C., and London, with editorialists all supporting the professor's right to impose his own standards. I wonder what the reaction of the same pundits would have been if a professor were requiring prospective medical doctors to affirm a belief in the sanctity of human life.

What interests me about the Dini case is why such a dispute erupted at this time, why it escalated, and why it attracted so much attention around the nation and even abroad. Texas Tech University competes for state funding with more powerful universities, in a state where many voters are creationists. The last thing it needs is to antagonize public opinion, yet Professor Dini picked a fight over belief in Darwinism, and the president of his university supported him. Some may also wonder why a Christian public interest law firm chose this case to pursue, and why the Justice Department invited editorial criticism by getting involved.

I have wondered why no journalist perceived that the dispute, however offbeat, raised a significant issue of principle that ought to have appealed to liberals. That educators should require only knowledge and not belief is an important tenet of Enlightenment rationalism, often invoked in liberal circles to distinguish secular from religious education, to the disadvantage of the latter. It is commonplace in law schools to say that compulsory affirmation of belief is a defining feature of totalitarian regimes, because coerced endorsement is more intrusive than prohibition of dissent. That is why religious dissenters may not be compelled to salute the flag, even in wartime.

An irony of our times is that liberals, who once proudly styled themselves as "freethinkers," and never imagined that they would one day be enforcers of dogma, are in a position, particularly in public education, to impose their prejudices on others. Now a burning issue is whether dissenters from the liberal credo should be permitted to do their own freethinking about such explosive subjects as abortion, homosexuality, and evolution. Freedom to disbelieve in the dominant creed should always be an appealing cause for true liberals. Sometimes the dissenters may seem unreasonable, but this just gives liberals a better opportunity to demonstrate that they stick to their principles even in the hardest cases, as when the ACLU defended the right of Nazis to hold a parade in the Jewish community of Skokie, Illinois.

Why did this dispute occur now, rather than earlier? The creation/evolution dispute is an active volcano in the United States again, with believers in creation convinced that the tide is at last turning in their favor as the Darwinists lose ground both in public opinion and in science. Many biology classes still teach that the classic peppered moth story shows the power of natural selection and that textbook illustrations of embryonic similarities prove evolutionary relationships. However, many people have found out what is wrong with the standard evidence for evolution, and skeptical students make a point of broadcasting what they know.

Journalists and biology teachers are fascinated by this renewal of an ancient conflict. Some are perplexed that creationists will not believe that their cause is hopeless, while others are alarmed by what they imagine to be a resurgence of religious fanaticism in America, something like the explosion of Islamic extremism around the world. Those who are alarmed and frustrated by their inability to persuade the public feel an urge to assert their authority before matters get out of hand.

If you take the challenge to evolutionary naturalism at all seriously, there is plenty of reason to be alarmed, because the stakes are immense. To see why, just consider the profound changes that occurred in Europe and America after the Darwinian triumph discredited what had previously been the prevailing doctrine about how the human and other species originated. One priesthood was dethroned, while another took its place and still rules the cognitive realm. There were consequences for biology, but far greater consequences for such cultural matters as the basis of law. God and his Commandments, once universally respected, became divisive concepts unfit for public display.

Could the Darwinian scriptures ever be discredited in their turn? That may seem impossible on the basis of the myth of linear progress we all absorbed in school, but our teachers did not foresee the changes we are witnessing. Who could have imagined the headlines of today only a few years ago, when our government was arming Islamic militants to destabilize the mighty Soviet Union? Or who could have predicted that it would become legally risky to express disapproval of homosexuality? Conventional thinking about what is possible seems to have overlooked something important.

In the case of Darwinism, that something is easy to describe. Our cognitive mandarins found evolutionary naturalism so congenial a philosophy that they thought it unimportant that nobody had ever proved that the Darwinian mechanism of random genetic variation, winnowed by differential survival and reproduction, ever could or did accomplish any significant biological creation. The spirit of the time allowed the most important element in the Darwinian scenario to be assumed, with the absence of proof concealed behind a myth of progress and a definition of “science” that made Darwinism virtually true by deduction.

As the myth of progress falters, thinking people are beginning to awake from their dogmatic slumbers and discard the restrictions that the mandarins have long imposed upon their minds. “Could the God of the Bible really be our creator after all? Why can’t we consider that possibility?”

For all their bravado, the ruling Darwinists know that their difficulties are growing. Hence, their efforts to persuade us have become ever more strident without becoming more persuasive. When a teacher has to resort to explicit coercion, he has abandoned hope of convincing the doubters. The situation today is very different from what it was fifty years ago, when Darwinists were confident that opposition was fading and that they would soon find whatever proof they still needed. They still have power to exclude and coerce, but when they have to display it openly, they reveal their weakness.

Note: Professor Dini recently amended his wording slightly, but the dispute remains unresolved. May a professor require belief in evolution, or only understanding?

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March 2003

Scouts and God

Scouts & God

Phillip E. Johnson

The *New York Times* reported on November 3, 2002, that a Seattle-area Eagle Scout named Darrell was asked to reconsider his outspoken atheism or leave the Boy Scouts. That this local story received national coverage doubtless reflects the determination of the elite press to take any opportunity to embarrass the Scouts for having excluded homosexual scoutmasters in an attempt to avoid the kind of catastrophe that has engulfed the Catholic Church. Darrell joined the Scouts at age nine and dropped his belief in God five years later, after studying evolution in ninth grade. Thereafter, when reciting the Boy Scout Oath, he either mumbled or omitted the words by which the scout swears to do his duty "to God."

No one took notice, and Darrell achieved the top scout rank of Eagle in high school despite making no effort to hide his atheism. Seattle-area scouting officials decided to make an issue of his unbelief only after Darrell, now a 19-year-old college freshman and a volunteer leader in a troop headed by his own mother, disputed the statement of a scouting official at a training session for adult leaders that an atheist could advance in scouting only by lying about his beliefs. Scouting officials have so far held firm to their position that, however worthy he may be in other respects, a Boy Scout cannot fulfill his obligation to be "reverent," or take in good faith the Boy Scout Oath, if he denies that God exists.

It is not likely that the courts will intervene, since the Supreme Court held in the "gay scoutmasters" case that the Scouts have a right to set their own membership standards. So this ruling will stand unless the officials are swayed by petitions on behalf of Darrell from local Scouts and their parents, or similar letters in the newspapers.

My own interest is not to attack or defend the decision, but to explore the problem it exposes. If it is important to the Boy Scouts that their members be and remain believers in God, then they need to make some effort to protect the boys under their care from the predictable effects of the teaching of evolution, that "universal acid," to use Daniel Dennett's classic phrase, which has dissolved the religious faith of so many. Perhaps there should be a merit badge for understanding the evolution controversy, including knowledge of the truth about the Haeckel embryo drawings, the Cambrian explosion, and the peppered moth story, as well as the philosophical assumptions that generate the theory. Darrel Lambert was concededly an outstanding Scout in every respect except his atheism, and my inference is that he is also a perceptive student who grasped not only the literal meaning but also the unstated implications of what he read in the textbooks about evolution and learned from other sources.

No doubt there are many youths who could get a good grade in an evolution course without ever perceiving that Darwin's theory implies agnosticism or something near it, and there are many more adults who, having lost their faith in God, will say the words of a creed if that is necessary to qualify for something that they want to do. Like the churches, the Scouts need leaders who firmly endorse their basic premises, and who know why they believe in them, so their belief does not collapse when it encounters another way of thinking that happens to be culturally dominant for now. Lukewarm and wavering semi-believers may do more damage than outright unbelievers, who at least fly their own colors. That being the case, the Scouts have to be concerned about youths who are being taught a way of thinking that undermines biblical theism at a fundamental level, even if the contradiction is blurred or even concealed much of the time to avoid alarming the public.

But what can they do about that concern? I imagine Scout leaders responding that their job is demanding enough as it is, and that they have to rely on the schools and the churches to do their own jobs. That is fair enough, and I would agree if I did not know that the schools are teaching or insinuating evolutionary naturalism, and most churches are doing very little about it.

The totem of "science," based on a naturalistic epistemology, is so powerful in our culture that nearly all institutions assume that they have no alternative but to accept not only its conclusions but also its modes of reasoning. If a weakened and gradually disappearing deity is the only one that is acceptable to science, then it seems that we may have to settle for that, if the alternative would bring us into conflict with science.

For now, the Boy Scouts and the churches have a legal privilege to practice what the legal and media cultures consider to be irrational discrimination, whether on the basis of sexual orientation or of religious belief, but I would not give that privilege a long life expectancy. The important thing in a culture conflict is not the current legal rules, but possession of the moral high ground. The rules change constantly in a culture based upon ideas of evolution and "progress," and one rule that is dissolving rapidly is the distinction between public and private institutions. A private organization may defy the dominant moral creed as long as it remains below the media radar screen, but pressure can be brought to bear whenever the dominant forces decide that some obstacle to their control of the culture has become intolerable.

For now, the law may allow the Boy Scouts to exclude atheists and homosexuals, but is it right for them to do so? That question will trouble the Scouts continually until the culture is persuaded again that God really is our creator rather than merely a product of the human imagination, and that he cares about what we do sufficiently to build a moral code into the bedrock of reality.

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Jan/Feb 2003

A Step Forward in Ohio

A Step Forward in Ohio

Phillip E. Johnson

In mid-October, a panel of the Ohio State School Board voted unanimously to adopt a new science teaching standard that allows teachers to inform students of evidence against the theory of evolution as well as for it. The standard defines "science" as the search for ever more adequate explanations of our world, rather than explanations that consider natural causes only. Teachers will presumably no longer be subject to dismissal for informing students about the grounds on which the ubiquitous peppered moth example has been severely criticized, or for saying that the impressive illustrations of vertebrate embryo similarities in their textbooks are inaccurate, taken from drawings by a nineteenth-century German Darwinian who was a little too eager to convince his countrymen that the theory was true.

This vote is a significant breakthrough in a major state towards official recognition that there is a scientific as well as a public controversy over the theory of evolution, and that the contested issues ought to be taught rather than suppressed. After having fought fiercely against the new standards, some Darwinists are now putting the best face on their loss by describing the outcome as a compromise, or even a victory for evolution, since it requires that the subject be taught. Other Darwinists are outraged that the state is recognizing that there is a controversy, and threaten to go to court to attack the "teach the controversy" approach as unconstitutional. Even creationists have mixed reactions. Some are negative, either because they think that the Genesis time scale is all-important or because they understandably don't trust the public schools to teach the subject fairly regardless of what the standards say.

I toured northern Ohio just after the decision, speaking to large, enthusiastic church crowds, and even leading a three-hour seminar for the area's ministers. I was trying to wake up well-meaning people to exactly what is at stake. Darwinism is only superficially about biology, I explained, and is culturally important because it implies that man created an imaginary God rather than that God created man. That implication explains why the media pundits throw a tantrum whenever they hear that the theory of evolution is being challenged, and that is why creation is not an issue that ministers can afford to delegate to scientists. It is futile to try to teach Christian morality if you do not also teach people why they should believe, in spite of what the most prominent spokesmen for evolutionary science are saying and writing, that God is real rather than a gradually vanishing product of the pre-modern imagination.

I count the Ohio decision as a victory for the fact of divine creation and for intellectual integrity, but not because I expect science teaching in Ohio schools to change significantly as a direct result. In these state conflicts, I am pursuing a strategy of "consciousness-raising," much like that employed by feminists to transform their movement from a laughingstock in the 1960s to an unstoppable force in the 1970s.

People who are being oppressed by unjust rules or dishonest intellectual conventions often do not realize it, either because their understanding is superficial or because they fatalistically assume that their condition is just "the way things have always been" and hence unchangeable. Change happens when they begin to understand that what is being done to them is outrageous and that the oppressive rules and conventions could be different if enough people combined in a determined effort to change them.

Considered in isolation, the Ohio decision is no more than a step towards teaching evolution as a controversial subject rather than a doctrine that everyone is expected to believe without question. I see the possibility, however, that this first small victory in a major state may be a sign that the tide of battle is at last turning. The greatest advantage the Darwinists have had is one that other materialists have exploited before them. It is the aura of inevitability, the sense that they embody a science that is predestined to roll over all opposition. People who have been indoctrinated in a modernist mindset no longer believe in the final victory of Christ. They believe that every knee shall bend and every tongue confess that science always advances.

Recently, a prominent Darwinist compared people like me to the Japanese soldier who was discovered hiding on a Philippine island many years after World War II had ended, believing that the war was still on and that Japan might yet stage a comeback. Darwinists do not say that they will win control of the culture someday. They say that they won that control in 1925 after the Scopes trial, as dramatized in *Inherit the Wind*, and that some people just haven't heard the news. Their celebration may be premature. If that Japanese soldier had appeared in 1960 with an army and had won even a small victory over the Americans, the history books would have to be rewritten.

The decisive turn of events is occurring not in public school curricula, but in the minds and writings of those who know the evidence and have some independence of mind. Darwinists know they are losing evidence, not gaining it, and that they are also losing public support. They are desperately trying to postpone admitting, for example, that peppered moths do not rest on tree trunks and that natural selection does not produce increases in genetic information. They are also getting practice in explaining away defeats rather than just in crowing over victories.

Once something starts to go wrong, an overconfident blusterer can find himself in trouble very quickly. For now, the Darwinists still dominate, but they are very worried, and they show it by their constantly shifting defensive tactics, ridiculing Christians one day and then proclaiming the harmony of religion and science the next. Those who love truth need only summon their courage to stand up to the bluff, and resolve to follow the evidence rather than the fashion. The ultimate triumph of He Who Is the Truth is assured, not the ultimate triumph of scientific materialism. You can count on it.

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December 2002

How Much Does It Cost?

How Much Does it Cost?

Phillip E. Johnson

When I was in law school, I took a federal income taxation class. An adage my professor quoted has stayed with me: "No man is required to arrange his affairs so as to pay the largest possible amount of tax." Of course, the principle he was really suggesting was that every man naturally will go to great lengths to see that he pays the lowest tax possible, short of risking prosecution. I have often used that adage as an example of how lawyers are trained to think, especially when a legal obligation is perceived as arbitrary, not linked to any compelling personal motivation. In such cases it is rational to want to know precisely what the obligation is so we can comply in a formal sense while minimizing the accompanying pain or cost.

There is a marvelous example of "lawyer-think" in Luke 10. A legal expert asked Jesus what he must do to inherit eternal life. Jesus responded by asking, "What is written in the law?" The man correctly replied by stating the two great commandments. Faced with the open-ended obligation to love his neighbor as himself, however, and seeking to justify his own life, the lawyer asked Jesus, "Who is my neighbor?" The question seems perfectly reasonable from our worldly point of view, even if we haven't been to law school. The commandment doesn't seem realistic unless we strictly limit the category of neighbor.

In response, Jesus tells the Parable of the Good Samaritan. Everyone agrees that the parable is sublime, but how does it answer the lawyer's question? It answers the question by saying that the lawyer has asked the wrong question. One does not inherit eternal life by following rules. Rules always invite the question, What is the cheapest way of complying or seeming to comply? To ask that is to miss the point of Jesus' teaching. The Samaritan does not have to ask how to inherit eternal life because he already has it. The parable invites the better question, How can I be at least in some way like that? The answer to that question might have been, "You must change the habits of your heart." A man whose attention is fixed on that possibility will probably tumble into eternal life without having to worry about how to inherit it.

For just over a year I have been writing a book about finding the right questions to ask about every problem or controversy, and this labor has bred a habit of mind that I find helpful in approaching Bible difficulties as well. For example, the Parable of the Unjust Steward in Luke 16 has led my wife's faithfully Christian father to speculate that some teachings of Jesus might be better forgotten. I have pondered the same point that bothers him. Why would Jesus cite the example of such a rascal, and with apparent approval?

The steward is explicitly labeled a "child of darkness," but the parable is meant for those of us who consider ourselves children of light. What should we make of the fact that such a wicked man at least had the good sense to know that he would soon be in need of grateful friends and to take action accordingly? If that was the wisest use of an unrepentant rascal's ill-gotten gains, then what use ought we children of light to make of our own resources, obtained in socially approved ways? When our own time of reckoning arrives, perhaps we will find that everything that is socially approved does not qualify as righteous, and we also may be glad to find that we have many grateful friends.

When I thought, not long ago, that I might be approaching death, I was greatly moved by re-encountering the story of Jacob Marley's ghost in Dickens's *A Christmas Carol*. Although Marley's money was gained by socially approved means, his ghost's torment is that, while he was alive, he had spurned numerous opportunities to perform kind and generous deeds. Such deeds would have created happiness that would be a joy for him to contemplate now, when he can see only the missed opportunities but can no longer do anything to pursue them. Probably

Marley, like a well-trained lawyer or accountant, went through life asking what the applicable rules required him to do. That was not the kind of question Jesus invited, and probably the links of Jacob Marley's chain were so many wrong questions that missed the point.

The one thing Marley's ghost could do at the end was to warn Scrooge of his peril, which he did with spectacular effect. Then the nighttime encounter with the three ghosts of Christmas taught Scrooge how miserable he already was in hoarding his wealth, and the final scene with the Cratchits showed how much happiness he gained from spreading it around. Like all the best fantasies, it is quite practical. I know a few "Good Samaritans," and they all seem to be getting a lot of fun out of life.

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October 2002

Ethics in a Vacuum

Ethics in a Vacuum

Phillip E. Johnson

The Watergate scandals of the early 1970s involved so many lawyers that the law schools and bar associations felt compelled to placate the public by requiring students and lawyers to take courses in legal ethics.

Whether this development benefited the public would be hard to say, but it certainly benefited some law professors such as myself. I taught professional responsibility (legal ethics) at two prominent law schools and even earned some nice fees testifying as an expert in the subject.

Once a gentleman's way of behaving towards other gentlemen, professional responsibility has become merely another economic regulatory system—the regulation of the behavior of lawyers. Like all other officially recognized forms of knowledge, it deals with means rather than ends. In accomplishing whatever they want or need to do, lawyers must stay within certain limits or they may get into trouble. The same is true of insurance salesmen. In both cases, you might teach economic actors to be careful by teaching them the rules and the danger of getting caught, but you will not teach them to be virtuous that way.

We professors can teach our students how to obey or evade the regulations, but we cannot teach them to internalize specific moral goals, because we have no basis or authority for doing so. We live in a nihilistic society where every individual claims the right to set his own goals without interference. To expect legal training to provide the goals is unrealistic. On the rare occasions when legal educators pretend otherwise, they should not be believed.

Today I see a similar charade being played out with the "ethics" of genetic wizardry. The scientists want to push technology to its limits, while the investors want to make profits to

recoup their huge investments. Both groups tend to have little respect for squeamish religious folk who object in principle to promising techniques like cloning. If there is a chance you might find a miracle cure and be showered with scientific prizes and profits, why not go for the gold and leave the nervous nellys to their nattering? The corporations know that they need ethics advisors to craft a strategy for persuading the public that everything is safe and that they are only tampering with tissues, not lives, but no one takes the exercise at face value. Ethics is effectively a division of corporate public relations.

I do not blame any particular individuals for this amorality. The situation could hardly be otherwise as long as our culture defines knowledge in pragmatic terms. We can have knowledge only of how to get more of whatever it is we happen to want, and so that is all we study. If you ask what we ought to want, our learned authorities can only shrug. That is a matter for personal belief, as to which each individual is an independent sovereign in his own kingdom of ends.

If ethics is to be more than another regulatory system or public relations program, it must be based on firm convictions about the purpose of life. When I speak with Christian students who are interested in going to law school, I can ask what they feel called by God to do with their lives. Then we can discuss how the rigorous analytical skills taught in law school can help them accomplish their goals. I can hardly imagine asking a law school class a question like "What is God calling you to do with your life?" That question would be considered either ridiculous or threatening, because it would be seen to invoke an illusory Being in a setting where it can only be a threat to individual freedom.

We can teach grade-school children in detail about what used to be called sexual perversion, because that is promoting the state-sanctioned goal of tolerance, but we cannot teach seriously about God even in universities, because God is deemed to be a subject that can only make trouble for everyone. If God is truly dead and buried, this attitude is defensible, but if he comes back into the world as I expect he will, it is going to look very silly. The greatest superstition of modernism is that, when God is scorned and rejected, everything else we need will still be available. Our recurring ethics crises give us an occasional flash of light to see the modernist superstition for what it is.

The latest flash of light comes from the debacle in business ethics that led to the spectacular scandals involving Enron and Arthur Andersen & Company. What did the corporate executives and the independent accounting firms do wrong? Stated without cant, they took big risks when that seemed the way to get stinking rich, and then they got caught when the market turned sour. If their luck had held, they would still be being praised as creative improvisers who knew how to bend the rules just enough. We cannot truly say much more than that, unless the purpose of the energy business and public accounting firms is something other than making as much money as possible without getting into trouble and losing everything. Perhaps ethics means no more than knowing when to take a risk and when to play it safe. If you were asked to explain to a business or law school class why ethics *does* mean more than that, and hoped to be taken seriously, where would you begin?

I can imagine defining accounting as a sacred calling, dedicated above all else to maintaining honesty. In that case, the best accountant would be the one who did the most in his professional lifetime to increase the amount of honesty in business, rather than the one who made the most money or helped his firm grow to colossal proportions. But who wants to miss out on lots of money just to pursue a goal like that?

I could say the same about law, defining the legal profession as a sacred calling dedicated to justice, if we had a culturally authoritative definition of justice. I am certain, however, that my visionary notion that lawyers should be pursuing some overriding goal would be seen by many as threatening and even totalitarian. I do not agree with that opinion, but I admit that the question of ultimate goals is a difficult one. I can imagine orienting the legal profession to a coherent goal, but the job would probably require a religious revival and a century of teaching to make the goal coherent and persuasive. The alternative to defining ultimate goals is to accept an amoral and chaotic social order. That is what we have done and the question is: How long will it take before we learn that this result is intolerable?

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July/August 2002

Right Sacrifice

Right Sacrifice

Phillip E. Johnson

The *New York Times* told a story recently that I can't get out of my mind. A 23-year-old Egyptian man named Hemeida was described by neighbors as devoted to his parents, looking forward to a normal family life for himself, enjoying pleasures like soccer and the beach, but consumed by what he saw on television of the suffering of the Palestinian Arabs. He carried a Koran in his pocket and was said to be devout, but not a zealot. One day, he heard the silent call of jihad and answered it by pushing past Egyptian guards into the no-man's land separating Israel from Egypt. He ignored warnings until an Israeli soldier shot him dead, as Hemeida, who carried no weapons or explosives, had evidently intended.

Hemeida learned the basic skills in a primary school funded by American aid, which was intended to build good will between Americans and Egyptians and seemed for a time to be succeeding. His father spent all he had on Hemeida's further education. The young man was said to be ambitious, but found no suitable opportunity for his talents, and in the end could do nothing more constructive than bring about his own death in a way that might take him to the Muslim paradise, although it is not certain that he even believed that.

Neighbors and relatives did not blame Hemeida for betraying his parents and doing nothing to help the Palestinians he supposedly loved. Instead, they turned in fury against American reporters, saying, "Those Israeli bullets are paid for by the United States!" I suppose the reporters were too sensitive or fearful to ask whether, if Israel were out of the picture, the young man would have found some other reason to kill himself. Local teachers voted to name a school after Hemeida, who is now celebrated in Egypt as the first in an anticipated new line of Arab martyrs to the Palestinian cause.

My first reaction was to think how different Hemeida's life might have been if he had carried a pocket New Testament instead of the Koran. So it might have been, but the tragedy cannot be explained merely by citing the notorious corruption of Egyptian society and the tendency of Islam to inspire murder and suicide. In American university cities such as Berkeley and Seattle, we have thousands of alienated young people who have been educated at their parents' expense, and our economy is booming with opportunities. These youths often seem to be loving, but many of them pursue not love, but hedonistic sex and drugs that ruin their health. They speak loudly of political ideals, but all they actually do is taunt police and smash windows to protest globalization for some reason they cannot articulate. They act only to destroy, and to some extent, they are encouraged in their senseless anger by teachers and cultural authorities who write for newspapers such as the *New York Times*, and who lionize anarchistic gangsters from a previous generation as if they were heroes. I recall Alexander Solzhenitsyn's prophetic words at the 1978 Harvard commencement: "When the government earnestly seeks to root out terrorism, public opinion accuses it of violating the terrorists' civil rights." It is as if he foresaw the loony pundits who pick away at every detail of the treatment of prisoners at Guantanamo Bay, seeming to treat mass murder as a matter of comparatively little account.

There is a vast outbreak of irrationality, not just in Egypt, but also in Europe and America, and those to whom we would look for wisdom seem to have no idea what to do about it. Young people need not just education or the prospect of material success, but a spiritual, imaginative vision that motivates them to make sacrifices to build good things, not to delude themselves that the remedy for injustice is destruction.

We are obviously in need of a spiritual renewal, in societies that are Muslim, nominally Christian, and purely secular. Nobody knows how to engineer this. The spirit blows where it will, and we do not know where it is going. We can try our best to teach sanity, but we must also pray that the Spirit will blow a pleasant surprise in our direction.

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June 2002

A Special Interview with Phillip E. Johnson

Berkeley's Radical

An Interview with Phillip E. Johnson

Phillip E. Johnson, J.D. (University of Chicago), is Professor of Law (emeritus) at the University of California at Berkeley, where he taught for 30 years. A frequent lecturer, he is also the author of Darwin on Trial, Reason in the Balance, Defeating Darwinism by Opening Minds, and The Wedge of Truth (all InterVarsity), as well as of two textbooks on criminal law.

Dr. Johnson is an elder in the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.), and he now has a regular column in Touchstone, "The Leading Edge." James M. Kushiner interviewed Johnson while attending a conference on Intelligent Design at Yale University in November 2000.

Touchstone: *Dr. Johnson, tell us about your upbringing. Were you raised in a Christian home?*

Phillip Johnson (PJ): Well, I grew up in Aurora, Illinois. We went to Sunday school because it was good for us kids. We'd drop my dad off at the golf course on the way. My mother told me I had to stay until I got confirmed, then I could go my own way. During high school I went to a liberal Congregationalist church, but I never took Christian doctrine seriously. It was just part of the culture, like the Boy Scouts. It was about being nice.

I went to Harvard at 17 and assumed I was leaving all that behind. I had every intention of simply adopting the Harvard philosophy, which was secular, pragmatic, and rational, because that's what you did if you wanted to be a big deal.

When did you go to Harvard?

PJ: In 1957, which was a significant year, the year of *Sputnik*. *Sputnik* created a completely new situation in American higher education because it scared the government; they thought we were going to lose our scientific preeminence. So they poured an enormous amount of money into the universities, especially for science. That's when the biological sciences curriculum really got started.

When you were at Harvard, were you on the "left" or the "right"?

PJ: I played at being the leftist, but I came from a conservative Midwestern background, so my instincts were always in that direction. I was just trying out my wings.

But when I got to the University of Chicago Law School, I discovered that all the bright people weren't liberals. I heard about Milton Friedman and George Stigler and other leading American economists whom I was never told about at Harvard. It was a bit of an eye-opener.

But unlike many people who go to Chicago, I didn't quite "eat the whole enchilada," which allowed me to be more flexible. I didn't completely buy into the market ideology, though I respected it.

I did well in law school, which put me in line to get top judicial clerkships, and then eventually became a professor. One of the biggest decisions I made in my life was choosing Berkeley instead of Yale. When I was a Supreme Court clerk, I was eagerly recruited by both, but I decided I'd rather live in Berkeley. The Berkeley law professors were more like me—public-school types. The Yale professors were a little too preppy for me. I thought, "Well, I'll never be a member of the club there," so I went to Berkeley.

I was a perfectly ordinary, middle-of-the-road secular rationalist, and a half-educated intellectual. I did well on tests but never worked very hard at my studies. I look back now and see that I didn't really know very much. I probably was a pretty ignorant person.

When did you go to Berkeley?

PJ: I started teaching law at Berkeley in 1967. In the 1970s they had even more student unrest at Harvard and Yale than at Berkeley. After I was at Berkeley and saw the student revolution up close, I found it wasn't very interesting. The leftist riots were old hat, and I got fed up with the irrational self-righteousness. This experience, which would have been the same at Yale, pushed me into a much more conservative set of views.

How did you come to realize the secular view lacked something? Obviously, one of the most important decisions you made was to become a Christian. How did that happen?

PJ: I became disillusioned during my thirties. The whole idea of the exciting campus ferment and student ideas became a disappointment. The academic career was also a disappointment. I think my motives for going into it, for everything I did, were rather shallow. I was basically an academic careerist seeking tenure, writing law review articles and a casebook. I had the career, but I was bored with it. I thought life ought to be more fulfilling than that. I was beginning to grow up.

I had been very happily married for some years, and then my marriage went bad. My wife got a heavy dose of the ideas that were rolling around in the '70s. She lost interest in our home and family and went off into artistic politics. After we split up, I took care of the kids. So I was disillusioned with my home life, my marriage, and my academic career.

In terms of my religious views during this period, what I usually say is, "I was raised as a nominal Christian and then I became a nominal agnostic." I didn't have any passion for it. In fact, I had read some of C. S. Lewis's books when I was in college and law school and admired them. I thought that they were attractive but not for people like me in modern times. "Too bad they aren't true" was my reaction.

When my marriage ended, I wondered what I was going to do with the rest of my life. That's when I had my conversion experience. This, I think, is true of many people; what leads you to a conversion is the loss of your faith in something else. My faith had been, "If you're a bright person with the right credentials, you'll have a happy and meaningful life." I expected that I would go from one distinguished position to the next, advance my career, be happy and satisfied, and that's what life would be about. It seemed to me that wasn't happening, and I was just going to be a law teacher for the rest of my life. It wasn't very meaningful or as good as I thought it would be. So I lost faith during that pragmatic period. Instead, I thought, "What makes me think that what I have is better than the Christian life?"

So I became a Christian when I was 38 and met my present wife, Kathie, at the First Presbyterian Church of Berkeley. Our lives were centered in that church. Kathie had been raised in a nominal Methodist home, and her first husband, like my first wife, had been very anti-Christian. So you might say we were negatively evangelized by our first spouses.

My conversion was gradual, not dramatic. The central issue for me was whether Christianity was real or imaginary. I lived in a society at the university that mostly assumed an easy-going agnosticism. So I felt it was necessary to come to a conclusion on whether Christian metaphysics were real or imaginary, or if I would be throwing my brains out the window and adopting a myth because it satisfied my personal needs.

How did you resolve that question?

PJ: First, I took up jurisprudence, the philosophical roots of law. That was in the wake of the emergence of what we call the Critical Legal Studies movement, which was the postmodernist, deconstructionist, epistemological relativism and Marxism that were in the English departments and had just come into the law schools, especially at Harvard and Stanford. I found it quite interesting. I was asked by the *Stanford Law Review* to contribute a negative piece to a volume of articles by leading members of the movement because they wanted an outsider's view.

I spent a whole year on that, reading these dense 120-page law review articles, studying continental philosophy, and so on, and developed a love-hate relationship with neo-Marxism. I disliked the infantile leftist politics intensely. I did agree with their critique of liberal rationalism and legal scholarship—where the law professor and the judge say, "Well, you there, you have your passions and your prejudices and your interests, whereas I just peer into the Constitution and decide what justice is." It's what I called the sham neutrality of liberal rationalism.

One of the leading examples of that was in the section on religion. In my article—my study guide of sham neutrality—I used as my textbook example the decision of the California Supreme Court on the government funding of abortions. The US Supreme Court said, "You have the right to get an abortion, but it's not unconstitutional for Congress to refuse to fund abortions as part of medical care." However, the California Supreme Court decided the issue the other way around; they said, "You do have to fund it." The justification for that conclusion began, "Now, we're not saying anything about the morality of abortion, we simply don't take any stance on that. All we're saying is that abortion has to be treated like other forms of child-birth decisions." So I said, "Well, why don't you say, 'We're not saying anything about the morality of abortion, we just feel it has to be treated as the equivalent of other forms of homicide?'" The classification was a moral statement, so it was a sham neutrality.

I used to refer jokingly to myself as the entire right wing of the Critical Legal Studies movement, which in their view was a contradiction in terms. Their critique was purely the instrument of a left-wing political program, which was chosen arbitrarily and presumed to be good. It was a faith commitment.

I picked up the same critique these Marxist law professors were making and turned it against a different set of subjects. My aim always was to demystify the kinds of doctrines the Critical Legal scholars wanted to protect. It never would have occurred to any of them to apply this sort of critique to a case promoting abortion because in their book that was a good thing. So it occurred to me, "Well, this can just as well be used to a different purpose. Let's deconstruct Marx." So that got me into jurisprudence and prompted a skeptical attitude towards rationalism.

I see the fruit of that now, 20 years later, in the first chapter of *The Wedge of Truth*. The young man I wrote about, Philip Wentworth, goes to Harvard, where he learns to keep an "open mind," but all that's really happened is that he's gone with the fashionable crowd and adopted their fashion, as he meant to do from the start. (I recognize so much of myself in that story.)

I became acutely aware that what we think is *reasoning* is very often *rationalization*. When you speak of rationality, there are two very distinct components. One is logical reasoning,

which is about going from premises to conclusions, conclusions that should be as good as your premises. Thus, logic will get you into insanity if you've got the wrong premises.

The other component of rationality is having the right premises. How do you get them and how do you determine that they are right? Not by logical reasoning, surely, because then you would be reasoning from other premises in order to justify them. There is an instinct, or revelation, or whatever you want to call it, that underlies your thinking, and the only interesting problem in philosophy is how you get *that*.

After figuring that out, it was the death of rationalism, as far as I was concerned. The problem with rationalism is that it isn't rational. It fails to give sufficient importance to the development of the choice of the right premises; it tries to justify them by circular reasoning. Once I was alert to that distinction, I was able to critique the things that previously I felt I had to take for granted.

Such as?

PJ: Eventually, the theory of evolution. Remember that my interest was in finding out whether the Christian gospel was rational. Of course, it wasn't rational by the standards of the academic world. One of the good things about the Christian life was that it opened up a whole world of intellectual input that previously had been closed to me. I began to understand what was actually wrong with the academic culture, and to put a name on my uneasiness. It was the seed of what would later be a full-blown critique of Darwinism. It "evolved" in a directed and purposeful manner!

I am now primarily dealing with people who have incorporated naturalist metaphysics into their definitions of science and reason. I've learned to identify that tendency, and I understand it very empathetically because I lived there for so long. I'm very different from most of the people I associate with now because they grew up in a Christian subculture, whereas my roots are in the academic subculture. I have a different set of experiences and thoughts.

"Where do the givens come from?" was the question I often asked myself. Eventually, that led me to the whole question of the gospel, and the way Jesus deals with people. "Follow me," he said. He gave a new set of premises, a new foundation. One of the very interesting things about Jesus is that when he deals with people, whether they are believers or unbelievers, friends or foes, they are supposed to know who he is. It's perfectly understandable: "I am who I say I am." When you see the truth, when you meet it face to face, you're expected to know it. If you refuse it, you are refusing to see the truth. I found that very fascinating—"How can that be?"

Much later I discovered Lesslie Newbigin, which was like meeting a long-lost twin brother from whom I had been separated at birth. We'd had totally different lives—he was an older man and a missionary—but I recognized in what he was writing the same line of thought that I had independently stumbled upon. Either the gospel of Christ is the centerpiece of a new order or it's nothing. That was so fascinating to me. Then I saw how this was the right principle and starting point. In all of my writing, I concentrate on that starting point. "In the beginning was the Word." A few simple principles. If you stay with those, you'll be all right.

When you say "the givens," do you mean the revelation that we have in Scripture, or is it something larger than that?

PJ: Something larger. The gospel is not the writing. It's described in the writing, but the Book of Mark isn't "the Way, the Truth, and the Life"—Jesus is. It's apparent in the Christian gospel that he is a living presence with whom you can make contact today. I sometimes say, when speaking in Christian circles, that I'm convinced that Jesus was who he said he was and did what he set out to do, but I'm not always sure that Christianity is a good thing. People erect the structures, which are partly divine in origin and incorporate part of the truth, but they also manufacture part of it and bring cultural influences to it.

Do you see anything of value in pre-Christian philosophical thinking?

PJ: If you read the Socratic dialogues and some of the things Socrates said, it's really eerie. Socrates says extraordinary things like, "If the perfect man ever lived on earth, you know what they'd do to him? They'd crucify him." Where did that come from?

From insight?

PJ: Yes. It's the most profound kind of insight at times. The critique of the common understanding of justice, the conspiracy of the weak against the strong in Book Two of *The Republic*, is something I review every year in my classes. It's the most profound analysis of human nature that you can get. On the other hand, there are a lot of dregs in Greek philosophy, too, so I wouldn't swallow it whole.

Humanly speaking, you have to understand all of their ideas in the light of tradition. Nobody should try to think entirely for himself; you learn an enormous amount from what has gone before. That there were other early important Christian thinkers was news to me. I didn't know whom I was reading about when I first encountered the Fathers of the Church because the version of Christianity I knew goes from St. Paul to Augustine to Aquinas and then to Calvin and Luther. So I think it's just wonderful that many Christians are rediscovering the church fathers.

So as a Christian you moved from philosophical considerations to an attack on Darwinism. Why Darwinism?

PJ: I wanted to know whether the fundamentals of the Christian worldview were fact or fantasy. Darwinism is a logical place to begin because, if Darwinism is true, Christian metaphysics is fantasy. That's why it's so marginalized and is considered to be of no intellectual interest.

I was surprised last night when someone quoted Darwin as saying, "Well, if we're going to talk about such-and-such, then you may as well ask about the origins of life." Darwin seemed to be putting the origin of life into a separate category of questions he wasn't really addressing.

PJ: Darwin was unsure about the origins of life, but he also made the initial speculation about life evolving in a warm little pond. The whole Darwinist method was immediately extended to include the origin of life. Darwinism is the methodology of philosophical materialism. Maybe *physicalism* would be a better term, given that Darwin didn't develop every last inch of the philosophy.

I got the opportunity when I was on a sabbatical in London in 1987 or 1988 to read more about Darwinism. It was immensely interesting to discover that it's all circular reasoning, deception, and pseudo-science. I had suspected that, but I saw that it was really true. It is a pseudo-science that simply works for confirming examples of a materialist philosophical system that's held up by a priori grids.

Was there anything you read that "made the light go on," so to speak?

PJ: The first book I read while on sabbatical was Dawkins's *Blind Watchmaker*, which seemed fairly convincing on the first reading but full of holes on the second. Michael Denton's *Evolution: A Theory in Crisis* did much to alert me to the issues.

But perhaps the greatest "Aha!" moment came when I was browsing in a bookstore in London with my wife. Kathie had been a bit skeptical of my developing interest in evolution. (I sometimes get in a little over my head.) She picked up a copy of Isaac Asimov's *Guide to Science*—900 pages of pretty good popular science writing—looked up *evolution*, and there was a brief description of the theory, plus three pages of heavy-handed ad hominem denunciation of creationists for not accepting the absolute truth of this theory that was so obvious to all thinking persons. Then there was a brief section called "Proof of Evolution," in which the entire proof—all the proof that Asimov thought was necessary—was the peppered moth experiment. So Kathie thought about it and said to me, "I think you're on to something." Such experiences have been repeated many times.

The ignorance that's involved, the indifference to the facts, is stunning. Anything that promotes the "Great Darwin" and the materialist understanding is uncritically received, unless it does something that's politically incorrect.

In short, my discovery that the reasoning in Darwinism is unscientific, illogical, and dishonest was tremendously important to me because it validates that "In the beginning was the Word" is really the correct starting point.

I then got to know the people from the main-stream community and the creationist world who are critical of Darwinism. What I brought to the dissident movement—Nancy Pearcey has pointed this out—was a sense of strategy.

People were caught in a rationalist mentality. They were thinking, "If we present facts and evidence, Stephen J. Gould will say, 'Oh yes, you're right and I'm wrong,'" and then the scientists would let them in. Well, I understand a little bit better how that world works, and I thought of it like a political campaign or big case litigation.

So the question is: "How to win?" That's when I began to develop what you now see full-fledged in the "wedge" strategy: "Stick with the most important thing"—the mechanism and the building up of information. Get the Bible and the Book of Genesis out of the debate because you do not want to raise the so-called Bible-science dichotomy. Phrase the argument in such a way that you can get it heard in the secular academy and in a way that tends to unify the religious dissenters. That means concentrating on, "Do you need a Creator to do the creating, or can nature do it on its own?" and refusing to get sidetracked onto other issues, which people are always trying to do. They'll ask, "What do you think of Noah's flood?" or something like that. Never bite on such questions because they'll lead you into a trackless wasteland and you'll never get out of it.

How did others become involved in the "wedge" strategy?

PJ: I met Steve Meyer, who was in England at the time. Through Steve, I got to know the others, who were developing what became the Intelligent Design movement. Michael Denton stayed in my home for three days while he was in the United States. Meyer introduced me to Paul Nelson, and so on. One by one, these people came together.

At that time there was a little funding to pay for people to come to Seattle occasionally for a conference. So they had me speak at one in 1989 to look me over. I soon became the leader of the group.

I also was introduced to Stephen Jay Gould and his scientific people and attended a seminar in the Boston area where I debated him, which gave me more confidence in our work. That was before I published *Darwin on Trial*. Of course, I'm much more knowledgeable now than I was then, but even then I still could hold my own with the kingpin on the other side. The debate was a draw, which was all I needed because a draw was as good as a victory.

Indeed, my philosophy is, when I do a serious debate, to play for a draw because I do not want my opponent and the audience going away saying, "That is one clever lawyer who can make you look like a fool in a debate." I want them to go away saying, "There's more to this than I thought. We ought to do this again." All you have to do is get the right issues on the table and then you win. You don't have to worry about it, because Darwinism is wrong, and it will self-destruct.

By the time *Darwin on Trial* was published, I had pretty well worked out the strategy I thought would, in time, win this campaign, and I've been able to convince most of the young-earth creationists and the old-earth creationists that this is the right way to proceed.

I had thought that I would be able to persuade the theistic evolutionists, but that was a total failure. It wasn't until I got to know them that I learned how they think. They are guided by the principle that we're not supposed to have any disagreements with the scientific establishment over science. Everything Richard Dawkins says is perfectly right and acceptable up to the moment he says, "And therefore there is no God." If he just didn't say those last words, he would be fine. I discovered that there was a total lack of interest in evidence and in asking scientific questions. When I tried to tell them it wasn't just the "And therefore there is no God" sentence that expressed Dawkins's atheism, but his whole scientific explanation was grounded in it, they were very resentful that I even raised the objection.

So they see a great gulf fixed between science and personal faith?

PJ: Yes. For them, the enemy is the Christian fundamentalist.

Well, aren't you their enemy, too?

PJ: When people start bashing fundamentalists, they start out talking about extreme literalists and so on. But the definition is in fact much broader than that. Anybody who thinks God is real in the sense that evolution is real is a fundamentalist. God is a Sunday morning truth or a Bible-study group truth. That's the way the secular world has it. They're willing to tolerate Christian faith among the students and faculty, provided they don't bring it into the classroom and the work world, where we talk about what *really* happened.

Theistic evolutionists are very content with maintaining that arrangement. They think that they could get along well with the secular world if it weren't for those troublemaking fundamentalists—and everybody who makes trouble is a fundamentalist.

I was the biggest troublemaker of all, so I found myself bitterly resented in the Christian academic world. Theistic evolution is the same thing as atheistic evolution with a certain amount of God-talk. They don't see any merit whatsoever in alleging that God left us *some* fingerprints on the evidence.

I should add that some of my close allies, colleagues, and friends are Christian college professors, so it's not as if they're all that way.

So theistic evolutionists aren't open to discussing Intelligent Design?

PJ: We've tried many times, but I've found that they are even harder to reason with than the atheistic evolutionists. I've been able to get along with the atheistic evolutionists better. It's disappointing.

But aside from that, I would now say that the project of developing a central position, which could unify the Christian world on this issue, has been accomplished. We're on the verge of success in the project of legitimating this issue in the secular academic realm. I don't know exactly when to say we've been successful. Maybe when we get a serious article about us in *Time* or the *New York Times*. We're still on the margins. We have this conference at Yale, but the Yale faculty aren't really embracing it. We had the conference at Baylor and got very eminent people from the other side to attend, so we're close to success on that front, but we haven't reached it. We have reached success in the unification of people who disagree about a whole lot of other things but agree that the wedge strategy is correct.

Are you happy with the broadness of the coalition in the sense of including Catholics and Orthodox?

PJ: Very happy. I think Catholic support is very important. A lot of Orthodox are friendly to it, and I also consider the Orthodox to be major players in this. I greatly cherish their support. Our movement is by its very nature ecumenical. One of the reasons why this issue has always been a loser is that it's only been taken up by Protestant fundamentalists. That has to change.

It's like the stereotype of the Scopes trial all over again.

PJ: That's a large reason for my redefining the issue. The mechanism of the wedge strategy is to make it attractive to Catholics, Orthodox, non-fundamentalist Protestants, observant Jews, and so on. This will be a long fight. Every month we're moving ahead, even when we get a little bit of a setback.

Once you absorb yourself in the issues and understand the way Darwinians think, you know that it's wrong and it's vulnerable, which is why they fight so desperately to maintain their monopoly on the public forum.

You have said there is no natural explanation for the rise of genetic information. How important is that question in the debate?

PJ: *The Wedge of Truth* is all about those issues. The scientific key is, "No natural processes create genetic information." As soon as we get that out, there's only one way the debate can go because Darwinists aren't going to come up with a mechanism. They'll start out talking about the peppered moth, and when that self-destructs, then they'll say, "Oh, self-organizing systems, or the fourth law of thermodynamics," and other nonsense, which is just covering up ignorance.

Genetic information is *the* issue, but it isn't the final issue. After you make that breakthrough, then you see other ways in which the theory is questionable. Darwinists will say, "Oh, well, maybe the mechanism has some problems, but the "fact of evolution"—common ancestry—is not in question. We distinguish the fact of evolution from the mechanism of evolution."

But that's a bogus distinction because the "fact"—common ancestry—incorporates the mechanism. It's just a matter of "now you see it, now you don't." They are saying the mechanism by which a father and mother give birth to children is the same mechanism by which our "bacterial ancestors" gave birth to human beings. They say it's all a process of natural reproduction and naturally occurring variation in the offspring.

Biologists affiliated with the Intelligent Design movement nail down the distinction by showing that DNA mutations do not create evolution in any significant sense. Instead, they make birth defects, so the whole thing is false from the get-go. There is no way you can establish that a bacterium is the parent of a complex animal. There is no mechanism to make the change, no historical or fossil evidence that such a change ever occurred, and there's no way to duplicate the process in a lab.

Once you get that in the debate, then we will be poised for a metaphysical and intellectual reversal that is every bit as profound as the one with Copernicus. People will say, "My gosh, we've been completely misled by this fundamental truth of the creation story of our culture. We can no longer understand the world that way."

How do you change the way people regard the authority of science? Get them to think of it as a much more limited thing. Science is very reliable when scientists stick to the kinds of things that can be tested by refutable experiments, but much of what they tell us is outside that. When they have to fake the mechanisms, it becomes a very dubious philosophy. That raises the question of why so many very brilliant people were misled for so long and did such a good job of rationalizing these things.

When the mechanism of Darwinism becomes discredited, it's like a train that's been turned around. You can say, "Well, that's interesting, but the train is still in the same place. The world, Yale, Berkeley, are still there. The *New York Times* is still telling us what to think. So why isn't everything different?" Well, it *is* different, but you can't see it yet. The train is turned in the opposite direction. It's going to start out very slowly, but it's moving on the logical tracks towards something very different, and when we get there, our great-great-grandchildren will see how different things are.

What are some of the books and writers that were formative influences on you?

PJ: I've told you I had read the popular Christian classics of Lewis and Chesterton and later, Lesslie Newbigin, and admired them. Michael Denton first introduced me to the fundamentals of the skeptical case about Darwinism.

When I think about things, much of what I get comes from my amateur's interest in history, especially military history. I'm always thinking things like, "This is like Napoleon in Moscow. He's taken over the whole country, but he's about to lose his army." The sweep of historical examples, rather than the philosophers, has influenced me.

I'm a great admirer of the literary classics by Chaucer, Shakespeare, Milton, and the Victorian novelists, especially Austen and Trollope. These are writers who help you have a Christian mindset. I think one of the great tragedies is that the loss of Christian faith and the meaning it gives to people's lives makes it impossible for them to really appreciate literature. With a play like *Hamlet*, for example, you have to inhabit the Christian metaphysical rooms to really grasp what the ghost is and understand that marvelous scene in which Hamlet decides not to kill the king while he is saying his prayers.

Those are the formative influences: history and literary classics. I also give a lot of credit to the authors I fought against.

Who are your heroes?

PJ: C. S. Lewis certainly was an intellectual hero in that Oxford common-room atmosphere of his time, to stand up for what he believed was right. The other reason I find him so overwhelmingly admirable is that when he was discouraged about philosophical issues after he debated Elisabeth Anscombe, he went off and wrote the *Narnia Chronicles*. How could a man like that, with no experience with children, write enduring classics of children's literature? It's one of the most astounding feats of virtuosity in literary history.

My wife is a collector of children's literature—we have 25,000 volumes in our home—so I have a deep appreciation for it, and for the ability to communicate with young people. Many people are urging me to try my hand at that sort of thing but I've never gotten up the nerve. Maybe I will someday.

What's next for Phil Johnson?

PJ: I'm phasing out my direct involvement in the battle over evolution because the next generation is perfectly capable of carrying the ball. Jonathan Wells, Steve Meyer, Mike Behe, and the rest know more than I do and are very capable writers and debaters.

My next project is to provide excellent worldview education for high school and college students. I see this as a fantastic opportunity to send thousands of these young people properly prepared into the best universities and graduate schools, with a mission to speak the truth and change them by prophetic utterance. I love the sense of having opened a young person's mind to truth and reality and knowing that they can do a great work. Nothing is more satisfying than that. If they have a better idea, they will be successful over time in changing the world. That's what I want to be directly involved in.

My colleague John Mark Reynolds and I are working with donors and organizations to design educational programs. We are proud of the Torrey Honors Institute at Biola University. The young people who are here at this conference are so eager to be intellectually empowered and capable of taking on these issues. I think we can teach them how to do that. They will be better educated than the students at secular schools.

I see my work as not just being about a scientific theory—it's about the definitions of knowledge and reality. I see it as empowering this young generation, and I also see it as being inherently ecumenical. That's represented by John Mark being Eastern Orthodox and me being a Presbyterian elder. Wherever I go, whether to a Southern Baptist, Catholic, or Orthodox church, I feel accepted into the Body.

The first thousand years of the Christian faith was the era of the great councils and of unity in the faith. The second millennium was the millennium of the schisms—the great East-West schism, the Reformation, and the splintering of Protestantism—and then the near destruction of the whole thing in the wake of materialism in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. But I see that ground being recaptured. All those centuries of strife and conflict and hatred—the engine has run down. There are still people who want to keep it going—I've met some of them—but I think the overwhelming sense is that we're tired of that. The third millennium has to be the millennium of reconstitution—from the bottom up. It's about recapturing the sense of the mystical union of the Body of Christ at the grassroots level. I see that happening all the time.

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May 2002

Not Just in Kansas Anymore

Not Just in Kansas Anymore

Phillip E. Johnson

During March most of my attention was focused (from a distance) on Ohio, where my Wedge colleagues were arguing that Ohio's public school science education standards should allow consideration of alternatives to Darwinism. These would include the possibility that the apparently designed adaptive features of living organisms reflect the activity of a real designer, rather than merely the purposeless Darwinian mechanism of mutation and selection. As in Kansas in 1999, the Darwinians began the battle by asking the state board of education to adopt new standards that would place a much greater emphasis upon biological evolution and give no recognition to the fact that a majority of Americans considers the subject controversial. Again, as in Kansas, some members of the Ohio board objected that the proposed standards were dogmatic and required concealment of weaknesses in the Darwinian theory, a practice more suggestive of indoctrination than education.

Most observers expected the scientific steamroller to run over the opposition once again, but a lot has changed since 1999. The Ohio dissenters were immediately joined by scientists and strategists from the Intelligent Design movement, and there was a new spirit of unity among Christians who had previously been divided over issues like the age of the earth. The most important change was that Congress had passed, and the President signed, a federal education bill. This statute was accompanied by a conference committee report incorporating language

first proposed by Senator Rick Santorum, stating that "where topics are taught that may generate controversy, the curriculum should help students to understand the full range of scientific views, why such topics may generate controversy, and how scientific discoveries can profoundly affect society."

In short, Congress contemplated that biology classes should explore matters that Darwinists would prefer to ignore, such as criticisms of classic textbook examples like the faked drawings of embryonic similarities, and even the possible role of Darwinian concepts in encouraging the scientific racism embodied in eugenics programs. Darwinists on the Ohio board at first obtained a legal opinion that they could ignore the report language, but this escape route was blocked by members of Congress who warned the board that "the Santorum language is now part of the law" and clarifies that "public school students are entitled to learn that there are differing scientific views on issues such as biological evolution."

European elites like to think that dissent from Darwinism does not exist in their countries, where people are far too sophisticated to believe in a Creator or an axis of evil. Now London is as absorbed with creationism as Ohio, however. Emanuel College is a public school endowed by a Christian philanthropist but operating on state funding, which teaches the six-day Genesis account as an alternative to Darwinism, and achieves excellent results in all subjects, according to government inspectors. Richard Dawkins is predictably furious, and the Prime Minister, who defended the school on the fashionably postmodernist ground that educational diversity is desirable, has faced questions in the House of Commons about his personal views on creation and evolution.

The big news from Ohio and London is that scientific authorities in both places act as if they cannot afford even a minor setback, and perhaps they are right to think so. The liberal Anglican bishop of Oxford was so exasperated with London's creationists that he asked rhetorically, "Do some people really think that the worldwide scientific community is engaged in a massive conspiracy to hoodwink the rest of us?" Raising the stakes to that level is a dangerous tactic. The scientific authorities already face widespread public and professional distrust on subjects ranging from global warming to genetically modified crops, and many people are prepared to contemplate that scientists as a class may be no more trustworthy than public accountants or modernist bishops. Scientific triumphalists remind me of Napoleon's army in Moscow. They have won many battles and captured an immense amount of territory, but they have no safe line of retreat. If something goes wrong, any withdrawal may become a rout.

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March 2002

Recognizing the Power of Religion

Recognizing the Power of Religion

Phillip E. Johnson

I woke up early on September 11, 2001, and booted up my computer to check the news on the Internet. I thus saw the earliest coverage of the hijacked jetliners striking the twin towers of the World Trade Center and the appalling destruction that followed. Anyone familiar with the Internet knows that hoaxes abound, and so it is wise not to repeat any sensational news until you are absolutely sure it really happened. As I paused to be sure my eyes were not deceiving me, I remember thinking, "I sure do hope that this is the mother of all Internet hoaxes." When the reality and extent of the devastation became clear, the following hours were largely spent wondering and worrying about what would come next.

The first public comment I recall hearing after the collapse of the towers was ascribed to Jerry Falwell, who was said to attribute the tragedy to God's disgust at the wickedness of Falwell's usual targets, particularly abortionists and homosexuals. This crudity was instantly condemned from every point on the political spectrum, including the religious right. The reaction from journalists was in many cases more "over the top" than the original remark, with various commentators suggesting that Falwell (and perhaps all Christian fundamentalists) belonged in the same category as the Islamic terrorists who had hijacked the airplanes.

Just as Falwell had seen the disaster as an opportunity to blame his usual scapegoats, the mainstream journalists seized the opportunity to blame their own preferred scapegoats—Christian fundamentalists. It probably never occurred to them that they were doing exactly the same thing that they condemned when Falwell did it. By media convention, religious "fundamentalists" (loosely defined) are what might be called designated scapegoats, who can be blamed at any time for just about anything. Homosexuals and abortion providers are in a protected category, however, and one rarely reads anything unfavorable about them in the newspapers.

From the opposite side of the Atlantic, and on the opposite side of the metaphysical spectrum from Jerry Falwell, the arch-Darwinist Richard Dawkins saw an opportunity to use the disaster as a club to berate his usual enemies, religious people in general. The root cause of fanaticism, Dawkins thought, was belief in life after death, which can turn an ordinary person into a self-guided missile capable of committing some horrible act such as the suicide attack we had just witnessed on television, in the hope of earning a reward in Paradise.

Dawkins's remark was patently absurd in a century in which a materialist philosophy called Marxist-Leninism had been responsible for about 100 million deaths. Dawkins was not publicly shamed as Falwell had been, because most prominent journalists share his prejudice, if in somewhat milder form. My own inclination was not to emphasize the absurdity of blaming Christians for Islamic extremism, but rather to focus upon the one thing that Dawkins had got right.

A man who believes in something that is more important to him than life itself is potentially a dangerous man. He may do things that a person with more mundane purposes would never think of doing. This is true of secular as well as religious faiths.

Consider, for example, the American Revolutionary War patriot Nathan Hale, who famously regretted that he had but one life to give for his country. Such a person might be capable of a suicide attack, given a sufficiently worthy end. (I would like to ask Dawkins if he might be

capable of sacrificing his own life in an act of murderous violence if he were convinced that such an extreme measure was necessary to save science from being taken over by religious fundamentalists.) People who care for nothing beyond their own comfort are safer, although a whole lot less inspiring, than people who are capable of risking their lives. Would we therefore wish that the world were rid of all causes and purposes that are larger than life, so we could rely on people to behave more like sheep, content to graze in comfortable pastures?

No, the right conclusion to draw from the terrorist attack is not that no one should have a cause worth dying for, but rather that it is of great importance that such highly motivated persons be dedicated to a good cause rather than an evil one. That assumes that we have a standard capable of distinguishing good from evil, and this may be in doubt in an era of moral relativism, when those for whom the supreme value is "tolerance" consider it more reprehensible to name evil than to do evil. If science is our only source of knowledge, and science gives us knowledge only of fact and not of value, then distinguishing between good and evil can only be a matter of arbitrary preference. Multitudes of young people have drawn precisely that conclusion, as their education has encouraged them to do.

Dawkins caricatured religious faith as if it were another kind of technology like hypnosis, useful for manipulating people. The terrorists may have believed something similar. They believed that their faith and determination, compared with the spiritual laziness and moral degeneracy that they attributed to their enemies, were great enough to overcome the immense material and technological superiority of the nation they were attacking.

In a limited sense, the terrorists accomplished their objective. Whatever we may say about the evil of mass murder, and whatever may turn out to be its lasting effect (beyond the destruction of the Taliban government in Afghanistan), the attack was a brilliant tactical success, employing some of their enemy's most technologically advanced equipment to achieve a spectacular destructive effect that the victims would never have imagined possible. The terrorists could never have built a jetliner, but, like their counterparts of centuries ago, they were skilled and ruthless at piracy.

One lesson to be drawn from this catastrophe is that American and European intellectuals have been very foolish to treat religious belief with patronizing disdain, as a remnant of pre-modernist thought that is doomed to fade in importance as mankind becomes more technologically advanced. I hope we will hear no more of that complacent illusion. The beliefs that the terrorists held, however misguided or evil, were powerful enough to make them very dangerous.

One of the results of the terrorist attack will surely be a vastly increased interest in Islam in particular, and religious faith in general. This is not a subject that even a technologically advanced and wealthy nation can afford any longer to ignore. People who believe in things that rationalists consider impossible may also be able to do things that rationalists consider impossible. If faith made the terrorists dangerous, then faith is something we had better learn to understand, in order to employ it for good purposes.

Phillip E. Johnson is a contributing editor of Touchstone.

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December 2001

Back Home in Mitford

Back Home in Mitford

The Leading Edge with Phillip Johnson

I recently spent a month in the hospital. The care was excellent, visitors were frequent, and even the food was tolerable, but even so, the monotonous hospital routine got me down. To give me an imaginative respite, my wife brought a copy of *A Common Life*, Jan Karon's latest novel of life in Mitford. Mitford is a sort of American Shangri-La, where the virtues of traditional small town life have been preserved through the influence of Father Tim, an aging Episcopal priest who still uses the old *Book of Common Prayer* and practices its principles. In *A Common Life*, Father Tim finally gets up the nerve to propose to his sweetheart, Cynthia (who writes and illustrates children's books featuring her cat, Violet). Thus ensues the mother of all sentimental weddings, with such trimmings as an a capella solo by the now 13-year-old waif Tim has raised, a bride who accidentally locks herself in the bathroom and almost misses the ceremony, and a scenic honeymoon cottage that is a shade *too* rustic.

Smile patronizingly if you like, but the story was perfect for the occasion. For an evening, my hospital room seemed to be in Mitford, and contentment filled my soul. In the morning I told my wife that I had enjoyed the book, but I was tempted to add that the setting was unbelievable, because in the real world Father Tim would have been put out to pasture by a Spong-like bishop to make way for some angry lesbian, and the state would be using its eminent domain power to level the town so pseudo-Indians could erect another casino.

Those cynical words never left my lips, however, because I remembered just in time to say, "Actually, we live in exactly that sort of place." Well, maybe not *exactly*, because the time warp in what we call the "People's Republic of Berkeley" is set to 1969, so the radicals (in Berkeley, that means people who oppose all change) can forever reenact the old demonstrations that gave them their pleasing glow of self-righteousness. If you are among Jan Karon's millions of contented readers, I imagine you are thinking, what could be more unlike Mitford than Berkeley?

You had better think again, because our part of Berkeley really is a lot like Mitford. Our Presbyterian church may not have anything as classy as the *Book of Common Prayer*, but we do have pastors who believe the creeds, the best plain food in town, peaceful coexistence between the Sunday morning traditional services and the Sunday evening praise band, and a congregation full of loving hearts. Our denomination (like Father Tim's) is run by fools whose religion is political correctness, but so far we have managed to ignore them.

So if you want to know where the common-sensical America of small towns and good neighbors has gone, it is still there, sometimes in the unlikeliest places. Besides, the old America wasn't always so sane. Mitford has one schizophrenic, but in the midwestern town where I grew up in the supposedly placid 1950s, the town madman got himself elected mayor,

picked up a floozy in a bar, and appointed her police chief. Our contemporary wacko politicians still have a ways to go to match that.

Berkeley/Mitford is also home to a great university, complete with public intellectuals who write for sophisticated journals like *The New York Review of Books*.

The most prominent of these is philosopher John Searle. Searle first came to public notice as the academic spokesman for the "free speech" demonstrators of 1964. Later he saw that the protests had become an end in themselves and were damaging the university, so he became a stalwart defender of Enlightenment rationalism against the postmodernist hordes. He remains a vehement materialist, although it was materialism that destroyed the metaphysical basis for value statements and hence made inevitable the nihilism that Searle has vainly resisted.

The latest Berkeley champion to take the field in defense of scientific materialism in the *New York Review of Books* is English professor Fred Crews, and this time the prime target of his two-part diatribe (in the October 4 and October 28, 2001 issues) is the very Wedge of which I am the leading edge. Crews once delighted readers with his clever parodies of literary criticism (*The Pooh Perplex*) until he turned against the Freudianism of his early days and took to flogging the dead horse of Freud's scientific pretensions with all the obsessive bitterness of an apostate.

Disenchantment with Freud turned Crews towards Darwin, and then to Richard Dawkins-style aggressive atheism. Many Darwinists try to avoid tying Darwinism too explicitly to atheism, for fear that the Christians will make serious trouble if they are not offered a fig leaf to cover their cognitive nakedness. Hence the patently insincere "compatibilism" of the PBS *Evolution* series (scoffingly dubbed "the neutered Darwin" by the Internet magazine *Slate*), which insists that Darwinism, including even such blatantly ideological branches as evolutionary psychology, is opposed only by Genesis literalists. The series shows biology professor Kenneth Miller taking Roman Catholic Communion to convey the impression that Darwinism is compatible even with the most traditional forms of Christianity.

Fred Crews will have none of this prevarication. He dismisses Stephen Jay Gould's lofty concept that science and religion are "non-overlapping magisteria" (with science policing the boundary) by remarking that "As Phillip Johnson has understandably complained, 'This is "separate but equal" of the *apartheid* variety.'" Crews told me that I would hate his pro-Darwinist essays, but of course I loved them. My goal has been to carry the case against Darwinism into the intellectual mainstream, and that effort has spectacularly succeeded when the editors of *The New York Review of Books* feel that they have to devote most of two issues to a defense of the endangered orthodoxy. Besides, my strategy requires driving a wedge between the atheistical Darwinists and their dupes in the religious world. Now it looks as if the most uncompromising Darwinists are going to wield the hammer for me.

If you'll excuse me, I have to go to a clan gathering in the country. My in-laws call it the "Nutting," because we used to use the occasion to glean the walnuts that remained on the ground after the picking machine had gone through the orchard. Does that sound corny? Well, that's how we are in Mitford.

*Contributing editor **Phillip Johnson's** stroke was more serious than previously reported, but he continues to recover very well at home, in a community that is more wholesome than its reputation would suggest.*

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October 2001

The Ghost in My Machine

The Ghost in My Machine

Phillip E. Johnson

David Lodge has been one of my favorite authors since I read his brilliant satires of academic life, *Changing Places* and *Small World*. His new novel, *Thinks ...*, retains the bawdy humor and satiric range of these earlier works. Professor Ralph Messenger, a paradigmatic scientific reductionist and lifelong philanderer, has a romance with a lady novelist, carried on—or expressed—mainly in the parallel journals that they keep.

Messenger insists that the only reality is one that can be captured in the objective, third-person manner of scientific explanation. Helen, the novelist, exists in the world of first-person narrative. After all, she is a novelist, as is David Lodge. The result is a hilarious juxtaposition of opposing worldviews, linked by the reality of sexual desire and the constant experience of betrayal and deception.

I read the book with enjoyment, but just after I finished it, I had an experience that made me feel more like a character in the book than a reader. I had a mysterious, seemingly causeless right-brain stroke, which left me feeling that I was the "ghost in the machine" that Messenger insisted did not exist. Well, this ghost certainly did exist, with the powerful sense that the suddenly defective machine I inhabited was not "me." My sense of being a soul in communication with other souls was only enhanced by the knowledge that I could no longer trust the machine, especially the brain, to do what it had always done.

Like David Lodge, I have always been on the side of the poet against the reductionist. Ralph Messenger may have doubted that *qualia* (subjective experience) really existed. But with him as with me, it was the ghost in the machine that made him ultimately real as a person, rather than a mere object to be studied. Now it is that personal experience that gives me hope and faith to repair the machine, so that I can learn to use and trust it again—as I always have.

Through the partial loss of the machine, I have found my true self existing in the love of others who—in waiting on and encouraging me—have illuminated who I really am and how I find that reality in the love of Christ as reflected in the love shared in the body of Christ. I feel sorry for anyone who has not yet found that reality, which far exceeds anything that can be described by the dispassionate, uninvolved outsider. My reality is my experience of the Word. In the beginning was the Word.

*Contributing Editor **Phillip Johnson** suffered a mild stroke in July 2001 and underwent rehabilitation until mid-August, during which time he wrote this article. He is recovering very well.*

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July/August 2001

History & Strange Reversals

History & Strange Reversals

Phillip E. Johnson

The April issue of *Christianity Today* features an article by Tim Stafford on some Evangelical Christian history professors who have gained scholarly prominence. Mark Noll of Wheaton, Harry Stout of Yale, and George Marsden of Notre Dame are major players in the academic mainstream. Some critics say their books are good but not distinctively Christian. Academic history, like natural science, imposes a requirement of methodological naturalism that disallows reference to the “God hypothesis.” If you want to speak to the academic culture, you have to obey the rules of its language game. In that case, how does the work of Christian historians differ from that of secular historians of comparable ability?

The problem arises because the scholars rightly want to make the kind of nuanced judgments that earn the respect of other historians, rather than be perceived as cheerleaders for some Christian cause. For example, Mark Noll has an understandable aversion to “providential history,” stemming from his reading of American Revolutionary War sermons of the “God is on our side” variety. But enlisting God on America’s side, or anybody’s side, is propaganda in a Christian vocabulary, not a genuinely Christian viewpoint about history.

Here is where I would start. A great deal of history has been written from the perspective of the Enlightenment rationalist story of progress. To put it crudely, the underlying story is that in Greece and Rome people made a start towards knowledge, but then the world was set back in the Middle Ages, when people threw their brains out the window. Just in time, modern science galloped to the rescue, preparing the way for a triumph of reason that is still unfortunately retarded by the lingering vestiges of superstition. That’s another form of providential history, as simple-minded in its way as the claim that God is an Englishman. The Enlightenment story is countered these days mainly by its equally crude postmodernist rival. This recasts Western patriarchal civilization as the villain of the story, with aboriginal peoples, proletarians, women, and homosexuals emerging as the heroes.

Christian historians have an opportunity to pose a new meta-narrative that is illuminating rather than merely tendentious. Mark Noll says that a theology of the Cross allows for “strange reversals,” in which admirable institutions nonetheless commit unspeakable evil, and yet good things somehow come out of hopeless situations. That makes me think of Jaroslav

Pelikan's marvelous *Jesus Through the Centuries*, which shows how the figure of Jesus emerges in distinct form in each era to encapsulate the reigning narrative. Reading that book convinced me not that Christians are necessarily playing on God's team, but that Jesus will still be active in the world when most of what we call "modernism" is gathering dust on library shelves.

George Marsden's *The Soul of the University* is a profoundly Christian book and was so perceived in the scholarly world. This is not because Marsden is overtly partisan but because his detailed account of the transformation of the universities' worldview implicitly challenged the Enlightenment meta-narrative. Ask an Enlightenment rationalist why universities secularized, and he will probably wonder what needs to be explained. People learned more, especially about science, and so of course they outgrew the superstitious beliefs that prevailed in a less enlightened age. But if you think that some of those old beliefs may have been closer to the truth than the new ones, then it's a fascinating project to find out why the new beliefs met so little effective resistance. Reflecting on how naturalism took over the universities may also prepare you to envisage one of those strange reversals that the theology of the Cross permits but the Enlightenment myth of progress does not. Good Christian history can make such possibilities come alive in our minds.

Two recent books from Christian publishers provide examples. Philip J. Sampson's *6 Modern Myths* (InterVarsity Press), which comes with an enthusiastic jacket endorsement by Mark Noll, tells how Enlightenment propagandists have continually employed myths drawn from (distorted) history to advance their worldview. Whether the subject is Galileo, Darwin, witches, or the environment, the story is always the same. Nasty and ignorant Christians try to prevent the Enlightenment heroes from bringing knowledge, tolerance, and progress to the world. If industrial technology causes pollution, then lingering Christian influences are to blame, just as lingering capitalist influences were blamed for the failures of the Soviet economy. The "Inherit the Wind" myth of the Scopes trial is perhaps the paradigmatic case of this pseudo-historical storytelling. The literature that contrasts the myth with the reality can contribute to a strange reversal regardless of whether it is explicitly Christian or not.

Another new book I admire is George Hunter's *Darwin's God: Evolution and the Problem of Evil* (Brazos Press, 2001). Hunter portrays Darwinism as primarily an exercise in theodicy, offering a solution to the problem of how to justify the existence of evil and suffering. Darwin went so far in removing God from responsibility for earthly suffering that he just about removed him from existence, but he was pursuing a line of reasoning that had originated with creationists. Understanding the role of theodicy in Darwinism helps to explain why the theory won support from many Christians, and why scientific difficulties alone cannot destroy its base of support.

As modernist rationalism fades into decline, Christian historians will find some wonderful stories to tell about this paradigm's rise and fall. Mark Noll has it right. The theology of the Cross inspires a narrative in which good and evil are often mixed, but where truth and life can unexpectedly emerge from despair with renewed strength.

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May 2001

Bill Clinton Was Right! (About the Human Genome)

Bill Clinton Was Right!

(About the Human Genome)

Phillip E. Johnson

On June 26, 2000, President Clinton held a press conference to announce that the scientific effort to sequence the human genome had met with substantial success. With typical enthusiasm, Clinton exulted that “today, we are learning the language in which God created life; we are gaining ever more awe for the complexity, the beauty, the wonder of God’s most divine and sacred gift.” Dr. Francis S. Collins, director of the government’s Human Genome Project, used similar theistic language, saying, “It is humbling for me and awe-inspiring to realize that we have caught the first glimpse of our own instruction book, previously known only to God.” Whether they knew it or not, President Clinton and Dr. Collins were restating the basic thesis of the Intelligent Design movement in biology. Terms like “language” and “instruction book” naturally occur to unprejudiced minds when they contemplate the intricate message conveyed by the chemical letters of DNA.

Many contemporary biologists regard the plain evidence of design with such disgust that they prefer to ignore it in favor of a different message, one that leaves God out of the picture and credits nature as the creator. Dr. David Baltimore, president of the California Institute of Technology, wrote in the *New York Times* that the genome project had revealed that “our genes look very much like those of fruit flies, worms and even plants.” This implies that “we are all descended from the same humble beginnings,” which Baltimore thought “should be, but won’t be, the end of creationism.” Another scientist who described himself as “a molecular biologist directly involved in sequencing and analyzing DNA” wrote to the *New York Times* that President Clinton’s theistic words “could not be further from the truth,” and that they would only “give more ammunition to creationists to further their destructive social and political agenda.” An Internet article by the bio-ethicist Arthur Caplan has announced that the otherwise baffling genome research has at long last proved that Darwin was right, because “evolution must make new genes from old parts.”

Let’s insist on some basic distinctions. Sure, human beings have some parts in common with other organisms. Airplanes, speedboats, and automobiles also have some similar parts because they require certain common functions, such as getting energy efficiently from petroleum. Silicon chips are ubiquitous in devices that are otherwise dissimilar. The mere existence of common features does not tell us how much intelligence went into the design of those features, nor does it tell us how it is possible to transform something even simpler than a worm into an intelligent being capable of sequencing a genome. In fact, the buzz around biology these days is that the genome findings are merely deepening the mystery of why human beings are so different from fruit flies, worms, and plants. Maybe genes are not so all-important as we have been led to believe. Bill Clinton got it right: The message of the genome is not that we can dispense with God now that we have science, but that we have more reason than ever to revere the author of the instruction book.

Bill Clinton was right about something else as well. Some of the biologists are eager to do some engineering, starting with eliminating specific diseases and going on to redesign the human species to produce such things as designer babies. Philosophy plays a big role in setting this agenda, because there is no barrier to experimenting on human beings if they are not fundamentally different from fruit flies, and there is no reason to reverence the existing genome if it was cobbled together by a mindless evolutionary process. The president tried to provide some reassurance against the dangers of human genetic engineering, vowing that “as we consider how to use new discoveries, we must also not retreat from our oldest and most cherished human values.” Specifically, “All of us are created equal, entitled to equal treatment under the law.”

President Clinton did not mention the possibility, widely discussed in scientific and philosophical circles, that what the wizards of biology are telling us may make some of our oldest and most cherished values obsolete. Scientific materialists say that to award a special status to human beings is an anthropocentric sin called speciesism, because the message of biology is that human beings are not created at all, much less in the image of God, but are merely one of the many products of evolution. In that case the formula that “we” are created equal raises the question: equal to what? Fruit flies, worms, and plants?

Scientific materialism knows nothing of the sacred and provides no platform for ethics. In a culture dominated by this philosophy, it appears increasingly unrealistic to imagine that the genetic engineers can be restrained from doing whatever they want to do, now that there are billionaires willing to provide the money. That sheds some light on what that biologist might have meant when he referred to the “destructive social and political agenda” of those of us who honor God as creator. We want to treat human life as sacred, and not as fodder for experimentation or engineering. To a scientific materialist intoxicated with the prospect of playing God, that’s destructive.

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March 2001

Faith Squandered

The Wedge

Why Rockefeller Financed Scientific Naturalism

Phillip E. Johnson

The nineteenth century was a disaster for Christianity, although it began well enough. In the early 1800s the Second Great Awakening filled America with evangelical faith, leading Alexis de Tocqueville to conclude that a vibrant Christianity was an essential element of the new nation’s democracy. In Britain, such outstanding leaders as William Wilberforce and John Henry Newman provided a new direction for Anglicans and Catholics alike, thus laying the

foundation for the moral renewal that characterized the reign of Victoria. Dedicated missionaries went forth to evangelize the world. It might have seemed that Enlightenment skepticism had been effectively answered.

Yet by the end of the century the fruit of that good start was withering away. A. N. Wilson's account of Victorian apostasy in *God's Funeral* gives one the sense of the air being let out of a great bag of gas, as the most perceptive intellectuals came to the conclusion, often reluctantly, that belief in the Christian God was no longer possible. This was an intellectual earthquake, in which the most important element was the cultural acceptance of Darwinism, even while Darwin's mechanism of natural selection was in eclipse among scientists. For the most part, the Victorian intellectuals, including even agnostics like T. H. Huxley, were not in rebellion against Christian morality. Their rebellion was against the concept of a God who was not restrained by the laws of natural science. A similar apostasy occurred among intellectuals in America, so that by 1900 the universities had embarked upon the course they pursued throughout the twentieth century. The Christian premises of higher education were first downplayed and then repudiated altogether. By 1950 most elite professors were outright agnostics, and (with rare exceptions like C. S. Lewis) the others embraced a liberal or timid theology that was headed in the same direction.

I've often wondered what happened to the Victorians, why they had so little resistance to the virus of scientific naturalism. Those thoughts were rekindled recently when I read *Titan*, Ron Chernow's superb biography of the first John D. Rockefeller. Rockefeller was a lifelong devout Baptist, who enjoyed attending church and teaching Sunday school. He never paid any attention to theology, however, and seems to have had no interest in Christian doctrine as opposed to Christian behavior. His was a works religion in which the path to salvation lay in abstemious habits, the creation of wealth, and philanthropy. Later this creed merged almost effortlessly with the social gospel, as the fortune produced by personal discipline was put to the service of progressive social policies determined by experts. That Rockefeller's faith was genuine is beyond doubt, and his philanthropy was a lifelong habit of that faith rather than a public relations strategy. Rockefeller's philanthropy was also intelligently targeted to achieve concrete results, such as the development of scientific medicine in general and the eradication of endemic hookworm in the American South in particular.

Despite all his native shrewdness, however, Rockefeller ended up financing the destruction of his own faith. This was most evident when, intending to create a great Baptist university in Chicago, he selected the liberal biblical scholar William Rainey Harper to direct the project. Harper used the money to recruit academic superstars like John Dewey, and such choices guaranteed that the University of Chicago would be effectively agnostic before it admitted its first student, regardless of how many trustees were Baptists. This was not exactly a betrayal, but more a logical outcome of Rockefeller's theological blindness. Chernow describes how Rockefeller's chief assistant in philanthropy, Frederick T. Gates, was a former Baptist minister who wrote: "My religion becomes . . . simply the service of humanity in the Spirit of Jesus. It is the religion of Jesus, of science, and of evolution alike. . . . There is no essential difference between religion and morality except that the one is more intense and passionate than the other."

Nobody seems to have told Rockefeller that a Christian university needs to stand for something more specific than a general endorsement of good deeds. Rockefeller's devoted son, who grew up in an intensely Baptist household, proposed in a 1917 address to the Baptist Social Union that the ecumenical church of the future "would pronounce ordinance, ritual,

creed, all non-essential for admission into the Kingdom of God or His Church. A life, not a creed, would be its test; what a man does, not what he professes; what he is, not what he has.” Correctly interpreted, that last sentence makes a sound point, because the best evidence of what a man believes is how he lives. We know that the senior and junior Rockefellers truly believed in using their wealth to help others, not because they said so, but because they willingly gave away so much of their fortune. To go from this evidentiary principle to the conclusion that it doesn’t much matter what a man believes, however, is to step off a cliff into the abyss of relativism. Once that lesson sinks in, it won’t much matter what a man *does* either.

The example of Rockefeller is only one of many illustrations of the point that it is a mistake to blame the declared enemies of religion for the present intellectually marginalized state of the Christian faith. The campaign to exclude God from the realm of knowledge succeeded mainly because the elite Christian intellectuals who advised benefactors like Rockefeller lacked discernment, and in many cases were themselves well along on the road to syncretism or apostasy. The worst of it is that, for the most part, the Christian intelligentsia hasn’t changed much.

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July/August 1999

The Wedge

The Wedge

Breaking the Modernist Monopoly on Science

Phillip E. Johnson

The movement we now call the Wedge made its public debut at a conference of scientists and philosophers held at Southern Methodist University in March 1992, following the publication of my book *Darwin on Trial*. The conference brought together as speakers some key Wedge figures, particularly Michael Behe, Stephen Meyer, William Dembski, and myself. It also brought a team of influential Darwinists, headed by Michael Ruse, to the table to discuss this proposition: “Darwinism and neo-Darwinism as generally held in our society carry with them an *a priori* commitment to metaphysical naturalism, which is essential to making a convincing case on their behalf.” As I wrote in my introduction to the first edition of the papers from that conference,

I do not think the issue was ever really confronted on this question. . . . What the anti-Darwinists called metaphysical naturalism the Darwinists called “science,” and they insisted that for science to cease being naturalistic would be for it to cease being science. To put the matter in the simplest possible

terms, the Darwinist response to the question presented was not “No, that is wrong, because the case for Darwinism can be made without assuming a naturalistic perspective.” Instead, they answered “So what? All that you are really saying is that Darwinism is science.”

That may seem a deadlock, but the amazing thing was that a respectable academic gathering was convened to discuss so inherently subversive a proposition. I was sure that in the long run discussions of that sort would be fatal for Darwinism because they would reveal that the theory finds its justification in philosophy, not evidence. Biologists have legitimate authority to tell us the facts that they observe, in the field and in their laboratories. They have no authority to tell the rest of us what metaphysical assumptions we must adopt. Once it becomes clear that the Darwinian theory rests upon a dogmatic philosophy rather than the weight of the evidence, the way will be open for dissenting opinions to get a fair hearing. In a nutshell, that is the Wedge strategy. Now that several years have passed and a new century is almost upon us, it is time to review how the Wedge has grown and progressed, to evaluate how far we have come, and to forecast what we expect to accomplish in the next decade. But first I need to explain the intellectual background in more detail.

The Background

Most persons who have written about creation and evolution have assumed that they were entering a debate over facts and evidence, and their objective accordingly has been to state in detail what they consider to be the facts and to support their conclusions with evidence. Darwinian evolutionary scientists assert confidently that the Genesis account is mythology, that the earth is billions of years old, that the first primitive living organism emerged from a chemical soup by some combination of chance and chemical laws, and that life thereafter evolved to its present diversity by natural means, guided by natural selection but not by God. Theistic evolutionists defend basically the same account, adding that the evolutionary process was sustained and guided by God in some manner that cannot be detected by scientific investigation. Biblical creationists defend the Genesis account, arguing that Darwinian evolution is bad or biased science while differing among themselves about such important details as whether the “days” of Genesis were twenty-four-hour periods or geological epochs, and whether Noah’s flood was worldwide or local. The argument never goes anywhere.

The Darwinists hold the dominant position in the sense that only their position is taught in public education or promoted in the national media. Nevertheless, they are frustrated and worried that so much resistance remains, especially in North America. Scientists, educators, museum curators, and others have made determined efforts to convince the public, but public opinion polls indicate that the public isn’t getting the message. Over 40 percent of Americans seem to be outright creationists, and most of the remainder say they believe in God-guided evolution. Less than 10 percent express agreement with the orthodox scientific doctrine that humans and all other living things evolved by a naturalistic process in which God played no discernible part. These figures, from recent polls, are practically unchanged from previous polls in the early 1980s. The Darwinists hold a commanding power position for the time being, but they have not convinced the masses. The situation is sufficiently precarious that in 1998 the National Academy of Sciences found it necessary to issue a guidebook on *Teaching About Evolution and the Nature of Science* (hereafter *Guidebook*) urging public school teachers to “teach evolution”—i.e., to promote the neo-Darwinian theory—regardless of local opposition.

By “teaching about evolution” the National Academy emphatically does *not* mean that the teachers should inform students candidly about why the subject is so controversial, and it especially does not want them to make students aware of the dissenting arguments (except perhaps in caricatured form, as presented by Darwinists like Carl Sagan and Stephen Jay Gould). Instead, the *Guidebook* encourages teachers to mollify the religious people with vague reassurances that “religious faith and scientific knowledge, which are both useful and important, are different,” and to deny that there is any real controversy because “there is no debate within the scientific community over whether evolution has occurred.” To make the controversy disappear, the *Guidebook* defines evolution so broadly (“descent with modification”) that it “occurs” every time a baby is born. Who can deny that babies are born, and dogs are bred, or that the gene pool is constantly being modified?

This strategy of trivializing the subject might be effective if the science educators and their allies completely controlled the channels of communication, but increasing numbers of high-school and college students come to the classroom already knowing that there are reasonable grounds for dissent, advocated by persons (such as the authors represented in this journal issue) with impressive scientific and academic credentials. The best-informed students also know that prominent writers like Richard Dawkins, Carl Sagan, Edward O. Wilson, and Daniel Dennett promote atheism in the name of evolutionary science, with the apparent approval of the scientific establishment. (Other authorities like Stephen Jay Gould purport to be more friendly to “religious belief,” but only on the condition that religious authorities stick to questions of moral values and defer to science on all issues of fact.) When the National Academy dodges all the tough questions with evasive platitudes, it effectively teaches independent-minded students to regard the pronouncements of science educators with no more trust than they regard political or commercial advertisements. Eventually the scientific community will pay a high price for this campaign of prevarication.

The Two Models of “Science”

The science educators don’t want to be dishonest, but they don’t know any other way to deal with people who are so irrational as to deny that our existence is best explained by evolution. The educators also think that they are giving as much respect to religious belief as they honestly can, and that to be more explicit on the subject would merely cause unnecessary offense and provoke emotional opposition. In consequence, they assume that an honest dialogue is impossible, and so they see no alternative but to counter the opposition with tactics of intimidation, evasion, and propaganda. Similarly, dissenters from evolutionary orthodoxy are often astonished that so many scientists cannot see that there is a genuine scientific case against Darwinism, and that widespread dissent cannot be dismissed out of hand as the product of ignorance or prejudice. Why can’t eminent scientists seem to grasp the obvious point that finch-beak variation does not even remotely illustrate a process capable of making birds in the first place?

The reason for this deadlock is quite simple. In our culture there are two distinct models of the scientific enterprise, and the persuasiveness of the case for Darwinian evolution depends entirely on which model you adopt.

In the first, *materialist* model, science is seen as based by definition upon philosophical naturalism or materialism. For present purposes naturalism and materialism amount to the same thing. The first asserts that nature is all there is, while the second adds that nature is made up of matter, i.e., the particles that physicists study, *and nothing else*. (Philosophers tend

to prefer the less familiar term *physicalism*, because it avoids the ordinary-language distinction between matter and energy—energy being also a physical entity.) Whichever term is used, every event or phenomenon is conclusively presumed to have a material cause, at least after the ultimate beginning. Within this first model, to postulate a non-material cause—such as an unevolved intelligence or vital force—for any event is to depart altogether from science and enter the territory of *religion*. For scientific materialists, this is equivalent to departing from objective reality into subjective belief. What we call intelligent design in biology is by this definition inherently antithetical to science, and so there cannot conceivably be evidence for it.

The second, or *empirical* model defines science strictly in terms of accepted procedures for testing hypotheses, such as repeatable experiments. (I use the term “empirical” here in its dictionary sense of “arising from observation or experiment”—as opposed to arising by deductive reasoning from philosophical axioms.) Of course scientific materialists also employ these testing procedures, but only up to the point where materialism itself comes into question. For true empiricists, whatever is testable by scientific methods is eligible for consideration. Within science one cannot argue for supernatural creation (or anything else) on the basis of ancient traditions or mystical experiences, but one can present evidence that unintelligent material causes were not adequate to do the work of biological creation. Whether some phenomenon could have been produced by unintelligent material causes, or whether an intelligent cause must be postulated, is eligible for investigation whether the phenomenon in question is a possible prehistoric artifact, a radio signal from space, or a biological cell.

If you adopt the materialist model, a materialistic evolutionary process that is at least roughly like neo-Darwinism follows as a matter of deductive logic, regardless of the evidence. Otherwise, how could complex organisms exist? To say that they are the product of design by an unevolved intelligence, even one that works by guiding evolution, would be to repudiate materialism and hence to abandon science. Before life, especially intelligent life, can come into existence, it must evolve from unintelligent matter by a naturalistic mechanism that must by definition be unintelligent. That mechanism must employ some combination of random variation and physical law (the principle of natural selection being a sort of law), because nothing else could have been available.

This kind of deductive reasoning is so overpowering to materialists that Darwinists sometimes say that their theory is as self-evidently true as the basic principles of arithmetic. Evolutionary biologist Paul Ewald exemplifies this Darwinian logic: “Darwin only had a couple of basic tenets. . . . You have heritable variation, and you’ve got differences in survival and reproduction among the variants. That’s the beauty of it. It has to be true—it’s like arithmetic. And if there is life on other planets, natural selection has to be the fundamental organizing principle there, too.” (Jill Cooper, “A New Germ Theory,” *The Atlantic*, February 1999.) The fallacy here is that from the proposition “heritable variation and differential survival occur,” it does not follow that these factors have any substantial creative power.

Scientific empiricists, as I use the term, hold that there are *three* kinds of causes to be considered rather than only two. Besides chance and law, there is also agency, which implies intelligence. Intelligence is not an occult entity, but a familiar aspect of everyday life and scientific practice. No one denies that such common technological artifacts as computers and automobiles are the product of intelligence, nor does anyone claim that this fact removes them from the territory of science and into that of religion.

It is also common in scientific practice to infer the existence of something that is not observable (cold dark matter, extinct ancestors that were not fossilized) because it is thought necessary to explain the phenomena that *are* observable. For example Carl Sagan's SETI (Search for Extraterrestrial Intelligence) radio telescopes search the sky for evidence of radio signals from space aliens. If they were to receive a signal containing a sequence of prime numbers, as portrayed in the movie *Contact*, they would conclude that it came from intelligent beings—without the need for independent evidence of the existence and nature of the aliens.

Evidence of intelligent design is permissible in such cases because it does not conflict with materialist metaphysics, the aliens being presumed to have evolved by natural selection. The proposition that the biological cell is the work of intelligence is out of the question for materialists not because of the evidence but because—in the words of famed Harvard University geneticist Richard Lewontin—“[our] materialism is absolute, we cannot allow a Divine Foot in the door.”

The confusion between these two models sets the stage for an unproductive argument that can never go anywhere. Scientific materialists think that advocates of intelligent design (ID) are either irrational or dishonest, because they are advocating as *science* a proposition that ought to be confined to *religion*, namely the claim that scientific evidence points to the reality of a designing intelligence in the origin and development of life. Moreover they claim to have positive evidence for intelligent design in biology when the rules of science-as-materialism specify that such a thing cannot exist. Materialists classify such people not as empiricists but as “creationists,” a term that in materialist jargon *means* biblical literalism and is inherently pejorative, suggesting a combination of irrationality and intellectual dishonesty. Hence materialists insist that “creationism,” including any consideration of ID, must be banned from scientific discussions, and even from public discourse altogether, as a reprehensible and unconstitutional attempt to pass off religion as science.

We who are willing to consider evidence for ID, on the other hand, think of ourselves as the true empiricists and hence the true practitioners of scientific thinking. From our standpoint it is the materialists who are the “fundamentalists,” in the pejorative sense of the term, because they adhere to a metaphysical dogma in the teeth of contrary scientific evidence. If design is a legitimate subject for scientific investigation in the case of computers, communications from space aliens, and peculiar markings on cave walls, why should it be arbitrarily excluded from consideration when dealing with the biological cell or the conscious mind? Whether the evidence actually does support design hypotheses in biology is a point in dispute, of course, but in our opinion the scientific materialists effectively concede the point when they adamantly refuse to admit a distinction between “materialism” and “science.” They must realize at some level that they cannot win the argument on the basis of evidence, and therefore must win it by imposing a definition of science that disqualifies their critics regardless of the evidence.

Two Examples from the National Academy of Sciences

The policy of supporting Darwinism and materialism leads science educators to present the subject in a manner that actively discourages students from cultivating the critical thinking skills that are essential in real scientific research. Students are also never prepared to understand public controversies over subjects like social Darwinism and genetic determinism because the educators present a whitewashed version of their theory. I'll give two illustrations, both involving the National Academy's *Guidebook*. I choose this particular text as an example

because it is simple, recent and has the official imprimatur of the nation's most prestigious scientific organization. Similar confusions abound in the literature of evolution at every level.

On page 19, the *Guidebook* describes one of the most frequently cited examples of natural selection, in a section titled "Ongoing Evolution Among Darwin's Finches." Here is the complete text:

A particularly interesting example of contemporary evolution involves the 13 species of finches studied by Darwin on the Galapagos Islands, now known as Darwin's finches. A research group led by Peter and Rosemary Grant of Princeton University has shown that a single year of drought on the islands can drive evolutionary changes in the finches. Drought diminishes supplies of easily cracked nuts but permits the survival of plants that produce larger, tougher nuts. Drought thus favors birds with strong, wide beaks that can break these tougher seeds, producing populations of birds with these traits. The Grants have estimated that if droughts occur about once every 10 years on the islands, a new species of finch might arise in only about 200 years.

A good science teacher might employ humor to illustrate the fallacy of extrapolation here. "If the average length of finch beaks in a population increases five per cent following drought years, and droughts occur every ten years, how long will it take the beaks to grow from an average of one inch in length to ten feet, or for finches to become eagles?" It is no wonder that the *Guidebook's* authors did not quote the title of the Grant's 1987 paper in *Nature*, "Oscillating Selection in Darwin's Finches," because that would have signaled to teachers, and perhaps also to bright students, that the finch-beak example involves no continuing directional change at all. The drought year in question was followed a few years later by floods, and the average beak size promptly went back to normal. But even if finches did grow steadily larger for a time, would this show that they can change into something completely different?

This example is not taken out of context, nor is it atypical. It follows the thesis of *The Beak of the Finch*, by Jonathan Weiner, a book that won the Pulitzer Prize in 1995 and has been enthusiastically recommended to the public by leading authorities, including the president of the National Academy of Sciences. It is easy to see why the Darwinists feel they have to present evidence in a selective and slanted manner. Under any kind of objective analysis, it would become apparent that the Darwinists have never discovered a mechanism capable of creating new complex organs, or changing one kind of body plan into another. (The finch-beak example is given top billing in the textbooks precisely because the other known examples of observed natural selection are even less impressive.) The Darwinist educators are determined to persuade rather than to educate, and so their textbooks have to bluff.

If a stock promoter drafted a prospectus the way the *Guidebook* presents the finch-beak story, by padding assets and concealing liabilities, purchasers would be entitled to recover damages for fraud and the promoter might go to jail. Yet scientific materialists do not consider such presentations to be dishonest, for the same reason that they do not consider it dishonest to omit from the high-school textbooks (as they do) any mention of the sudden and mysterious appearance of the animal phyla in the Cambrian explosion. Specific evidentiary problems can't be all that serious, they reason, since some materialist process has to have done all the creating regardless of the evidence. If the mechanism that produced the Cambrian explosion is not yet fully understood, this is a problem for advanced researchers. Students can't be taught

everything at once, and to avoid encouraging them in unsound ways of thinking it is best not to make them aware of the kind of evidence that causes people to form doubts.

I could give many other examples of how Darwinian educational materials present scientific evidence selectively or misleadingly, but for my second example I would rather discuss an important sin of omission. Readers today are virtually assaulted with books by eminent scientific authorities presenting a materialist and determinist worldview in the name of science. The Harvard zoologist Edward Wilson's 1998 book *Consilience* argues that not only scientists but also theologians and literary scholars should base their work strictly on Darwinian assumptions. Philosopher Daniel Dennett describes Darwin's theory as a "universal acid; it eats through just about every traditional concept and leaves in its wake a revolutionized world view." (The view that God is a valid source of moral standards is one of those traditional concepts that Darwin's theory eats through, notwithstanding the vague reassurances science educators provide for religious parents.)

Influential evolutionary psychologists like Steven Pinker and Robert Wright describe human behavior as the product of genetic programs honed by natural selection, while eminent evolutionists of the political left, such as Stephen Jay Gould and Richard Lewontin, describe evolutionary psychology as a pseudoscience honed by prejudice. Molecular geneticists propose projects to alter the human genome, at first to eliminate specific genetic defects and then eventually to improve the species overall. They see no reason to respect the existing design of an organism that was produced by unintelligent mechanisms that could hardly be expected to do the job right.

Behind all the specific controversies lies one important question that the educators systematically evade. Are evolutionary and materialist assumptions merely a convention of scientific investigation, or are they valid for all purposes? When science educators are trying to justify excluding non-materialistic thoughts from the science curriculum, they tend to portray science as merely "one way of knowing," with the implication that other ways of knowing are equally valid. When you press them to specify *which* other ways of knowing are as valid as science, they can't think of any examples. It turns out that what they really mean is that science is the *only* way of knowing, and outside of science there are only subjective beliefs and feelings. A typical comment is that one can "feel" a sense of awe or beauty towards some object like the rainbow, even though we know through scientific investigation how the color spectrum is produced. Religious "faith," aesthetic "feelings," and moral "beliefs" are continually contrasted with scientific "knowledge," a division that assumes that only science provides truths that are valid for everybody.

For those who think that science is the only path to knowledge, and there are many such in the National Academy, it is important to extend the realm of science as far as possible to avoid a complete relativism on all subjects involving any question of value. This explains why pseudoscientific fads such as behaviorism, Freudianism, Marxism, and social Darwinism tend to gain so much influence, and to reappear in new guises every time they are discredited. It also explains why thinkers who don't claim scientific authority tend to teach that *all* knowledge is relative to particular interpretive communities. When only science is deemed capable of creating knowledge, ambitious worldview-proclaimers will either style themselves as scientists, or say that their nihilism is itself an inevitable consequence of scientific knowledge. Is it *true* that science is the only way of gaining objective knowledge, and that outside of science there is only subjective faith and belief? That is the message the

National Academy apparently wishes to convey, but it does so by persistent insinuation rather than explicit statement in order to maintain the pose of neutrality towards “religious belief.”

The Right Question

In short, our scientific leadership is in a philosophical muddle and is only making things worse with its campaign of intimidation, factual misrepresentation, and semantic legerdemain. To put things on a more rational basis, the first thing that has to be done is to get the Bible out of the discussion. Too many people, including journalists, have seen the movie *Inherit the Wind* and have become convinced that everyone who questions Darwinism must want to remove the microscopes and textbooks from the biology classrooms and just read the book of Genesis to the students. It is vital not to give any encouragement to this prejudice, and to keep the discussion strictly on the scientific evidence and the philosophical assumptions. This is not to say that the biblical issues are unimportant; the point is rather that the time to address them will be after we have separated materialist prejudice from scientific fact.

The question for now is not whether the vast claims of Darwinian evolution conflict with Genesis, but whether they conflict with the evidence of biology. To make that question visible, it is necessary to distinguish between the dictates of materialist philosophy and the inferences that one might legitimately draw from the evidence in the absence of a materialist bias. So I put this simple question to the Darwinian establishment: *What should we do if empirical evidence and materialist philosophy are going in different directions? Suppose, for example, that the evidence suggests that intelligent causes were involved in biological creation. Should we follow the evidence or the philosophy?*

Scientific materialists find that question impossible to answer, or even to comprehend, because they identify materialism not only with science, but also with rationality itself. In their minds the only alternative to materialism is a chaotic animism in which science is impossible because all events occur at the whim of capricious spirits, a world in which every question about causation can be answered with a shrug and the remark “it must be the will of God.” This is nonsense, of course. The very idea of natural laws stems from the concept that the world is ruled by a rational lawgiver, just as it is a historical fact that modern science grew out of a worldview guided by biblical theism. One of the absurdities of materialism is that it assumes that the world can be rationally comprehensible only if it is entirely the product of irrational, unguided mechanisms. Another absurdity is that the scientific mind itself was designed by natural selection, a force that rewards only superiority at reproduction and by whose standards the mind of the cockroach is every bit as effective as the mind of Einstein. On the contrary, the rationality and reliability of the scientific mind rests on the fact that the mind was designed in the image of the mind of the Creator, who made both the laws and our capacity to understand them.

Diehard materialists will never agree that there can be a contradiction between the findings of empirical science and the dictates of materialist philosophy, but more open-minded thinkers will grasp the possibility at once. To get the necessary reconsideration going, the first priority for critics of scientific materialism is to state the critique of materialism and naturalism in language that the intellectual community can recognize as legitimate. In the world of the university it is not legitimate to set up the Bible as authority against the evidence of scientific observation, but it is very legitimate to show that people who claim to be basing their ideology on observation or neutral reasoning are actually proceeding on the basis of powerful hidden assumptions. It is also legitimate to show that a specific scientific observation—such

as the finch-beak example—appears to be evidence that natural selection has creative power only if you interpret the evidence with a powerful materialist bias.

The Wedge Strategy

This is where the Wedge comes in. To get the intellectual world discussing a new and possibly unwelcome question, it is not enough just to write a book or make an argument. We have to inspire a lot of people to start doing intellectual work based on the right questions, work of such high quality and persuasive force that the world cannot avoid discussing it. These thinkers have to produce books and articles that explore in detail what happens when you call materialism into question rather than take it for granted. As the discussion proceeds, the intellectual world will become gradually accustomed to treating materialism and naturalism as subjects to be analyzed and debated, rather than as tacit foundational assumptions that can never be criticized. Eventually the answer to our prime question will become too obvious to be in doubt. When the philosophy conflicts with the evidence, real scientists follow the evidence. It will be equally obvious that thinkers outside of science should not allow scientists to abuse their proper authority by forcing dubious philosophical assumptions on the rest of the world. The answers will take care of themselves once the discussion is directed to the right questions.

The metaphor of the Wedge portrays the modernist scientific and intellectual world, with its materialist assumptions, as a thick and seemingly impenetrable log. Such a log can be split wide open, however, if you can find a crack and pound the sharp edge of a wedge into it. There are a number of inviting cracks in modernism, but probably the most important one involves its creation story, and the huge gap between the materialist and empiricist definitions of science. My own writing and speaking represents the sharp edge of the Wedge. I make the first penetration, seeking always only to legitimate a line of inquiry rather than to win a debate, measuring success by the number of significant thinkers I draw into the discussion rather than by the conclusions that they draw for the present.

There are some very gifted people following me into the gradually widening opening, taking the discussion to levels I could never reach by myself. The first and most famous example is Michael Behe. I explained in layman's terms why the Darwinian mechanism can't do what it has to do, and Behe explained in scientific terms exactly what that means when you understand how biology operates at the molecular level. Behe's book *Darwin's Black Box* has sold a lot of copies and received a lot of reviews. The reviewers say what I knew they would say: Behe's scientific description is accurate, but his thesis is unacceptable because it points to a conclusion that materialists are determined to avoid. Of course, the reviewers tend to be philosophically naive souls who mix the two models up in their minds. They think that sticking to the evidence means sticking to materialism regardless of the evidence. That kind of logic may satisfy those who are highly prejudiced in favor of materialism, but it will not work with those who are inclined to doubt.

After Behe comes William Dembski, with his remorselessly rigorous *The Design Inference*. Dembski's philosophical and mathematical reasoning is highly sophisticated, but his fundamental proposition is pure common sense. It is that intelligent causes can do things that unintelligent causes cannot do, and scientific investigation can tell the difference. I attended a seminar on Dembski's ideas recently at a major university philosophy department, where I saw from the reactions how common it is for clever people to deploy their mental agility in

the service of obscurity. But Dembski put the concept of intelligent design on their mental maps, and eventually they will get used to it.

After Dembski come a lot more. My sense is that the battle against the Darwinian mechanism has already been won at the intellectual level, although not at the political level. When I debate Darwinists, they rarely try to defend examples like finch-beak variation as showing a mechanism that can really create complex genetic information or the sort of molecular mechanisms that Behe's book describes. Instead, they shift the burden of proof to the skeptics, arguing that the mere fact we don't have a satisfactory mechanism for now doesn't necessarily mean that one will not be discovered at some time in the future. (For reasons previously explained, scientific materialists consider the promise of a materialist mechanism in the future to be equivalent to the demonstration of a mechanism in the present. If the whole system is as true as arithmetic, the missing mechanism will inevitably be discovered.) When they are on the defensive, Darwinists frequently dismiss the mechanism as a mere detail, insisting that all scientists are agreed that "evolution is a fact," even though they may disagree about exactly how it occurred. Evolution without a specific mechanism is too vague to be testable. The theory claims, for example, that an ancestral bacterium produced distant descendants as diverse as the worm and the lobster. How can one test such an ambitious claim if no details of the transformation are specified?

When the claim that large-scale evolutionary changes occur is made specific, then it becomes testable. So far the claim is failing the tests. Wedge members Paul Nelson and Jonathan Wells have shown this by describing the dissimilarity of supposed evolutionary cousins at the earlier embryonic stages, and by reviewing the literature describing attempts by biologists to change the direction of embryonic development by inducing mutations in the DNA. What the results show is that mutations either have no effect on the developing embryo or they have a damaging effect, leading to death or birth defects unless the developmental repair mechanisms can fix the damage. What mutations never do is to change the direction of development, as would have to happen if evolutionary transformation were to occur. To put it simply, you may believe on philosophical grounds that large-scale evolutionary transformations must have occurred, but this belief finds no support in the experimental evidence. If they did occur, no one knows how.

The Future

Persons who consider only the cultural power of evolutionary naturalism and see how thoroughly it dominates the contemporary mind, may suppose that the Wedge's critique of scientific materialism is a quixotic venture that can never succeed. On the contrary, I think our success is all but inevitable. In arguing that we should distinguish between objective empirical testing on the one hand and deductive reasoning from materialist philosophical assumptions on the other, we are making a point of elementary logic that is irresistible once it is understood. The only obstacle to a breakthrough is the longstanding prejudice, so deeply ingrained in educational practice, which says that materialism and science are the same thing, and that there cannot be evidence of design in biology because materialist prejudice forbids it. A prejudice like that can be protected for a while, but in the end reason always breaks through.

I measure our success in two ways. First, many thousands of high-school and college students are reading our literature, and are responding very favorably. As they learn that the official textbooks present the evidence selectively, and even distort it in the manner illustrated by the

finch-beak example, many become highly motivated to challenge the dogmatic system that is being foisted on them. The most talented of these will be the Wedge members of the future. Second, the Darwinists are completely unable to meet our challenge at the intellectual level, and scarcely try. Their literature continues to promote the view that the only dissenters from Darwinism are religious fundamentalists who don't know about the overwhelming evidence that proves that "evolution has occurred." This caricature of the opposition works only with people who have never heard the dissenting arguments firsthand. With the growth of private schooling (including home schooling) and the Internet, it is no longer as easy as it was for educators to ensure that students hear only the official version of the story. Once independent-thinking young people have read the dissenting literature, they are not likely to be impressed with the evasive statements of the Darwinist establishment.

Success for the Wedge does not mean replacing one dogmatic system with another. Our objective is not to impose a solution, but to open the most important areas of intellectual inquiry to fresh thinking. If the fall of Darwinism inspires materialists to develop a new theory that can survive unbiased scientific testing, then so be it. If they can't do that, then the world will face the astonishing truth that the evidence of biology actually *supports* the popular belief that living organisms are the product of an intelligent creator rather than a blind material force. When that realization sinks in, the next big project on the intellectual agenda will be to understand why so many brilliant people fooled themselves so completely for so long. Exploring that question will make the twenty-first century a very exciting time.

Two Key Terms

Darwinism: Living things originate through descent with modification (*descent* means descent from one or a few primitive ancestral forms; *modification* means natural selection of random variations).

Neo-Darwinism: Same as above, but with the process of modification cast in genetic terms (genetic mutations are the source of variations, and natural selection produces changes in gene frequencies).

The Peppered Moth Story

The National Academy's *Guidebook* ignores the standard textbook example of evolution by natural selection, the peppered moths of the English midland forests. This moth population was predominantly light-colored in the early nineteenth century, and then became predominantly dark during the late nineteenth century. According to the textbook story, the moths rest during the day on tree trunks and are eaten there by birds. While the tree trunks were light-colored, the light moths were better camouflaged, but the dark moths had the advantage after the trunks became dark due to the effects of industrial pollution. The light moths made a comeback after the advent of air pollution control laws in the 1950s.

Even taken at face value, the moth story (like the finch-beak story) involves no innovation or directional change. Discoveries in the 1980s showed, moreover, that the moths do not normally rest on tree trunks. All textbook photographs of peppered moths on tree trunks were

produced either by manually positioning live moths (which are torpid during the day) or by gluing dead moths to tree trunks. The textbook story is now thoroughly discredited, and its continued use shows how desperate Darwinists are to provide confirmation for their cherished theory. See Coyne, "Not Black and White," *Nature*, vol. 396, pp. 35–36 (1998).

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